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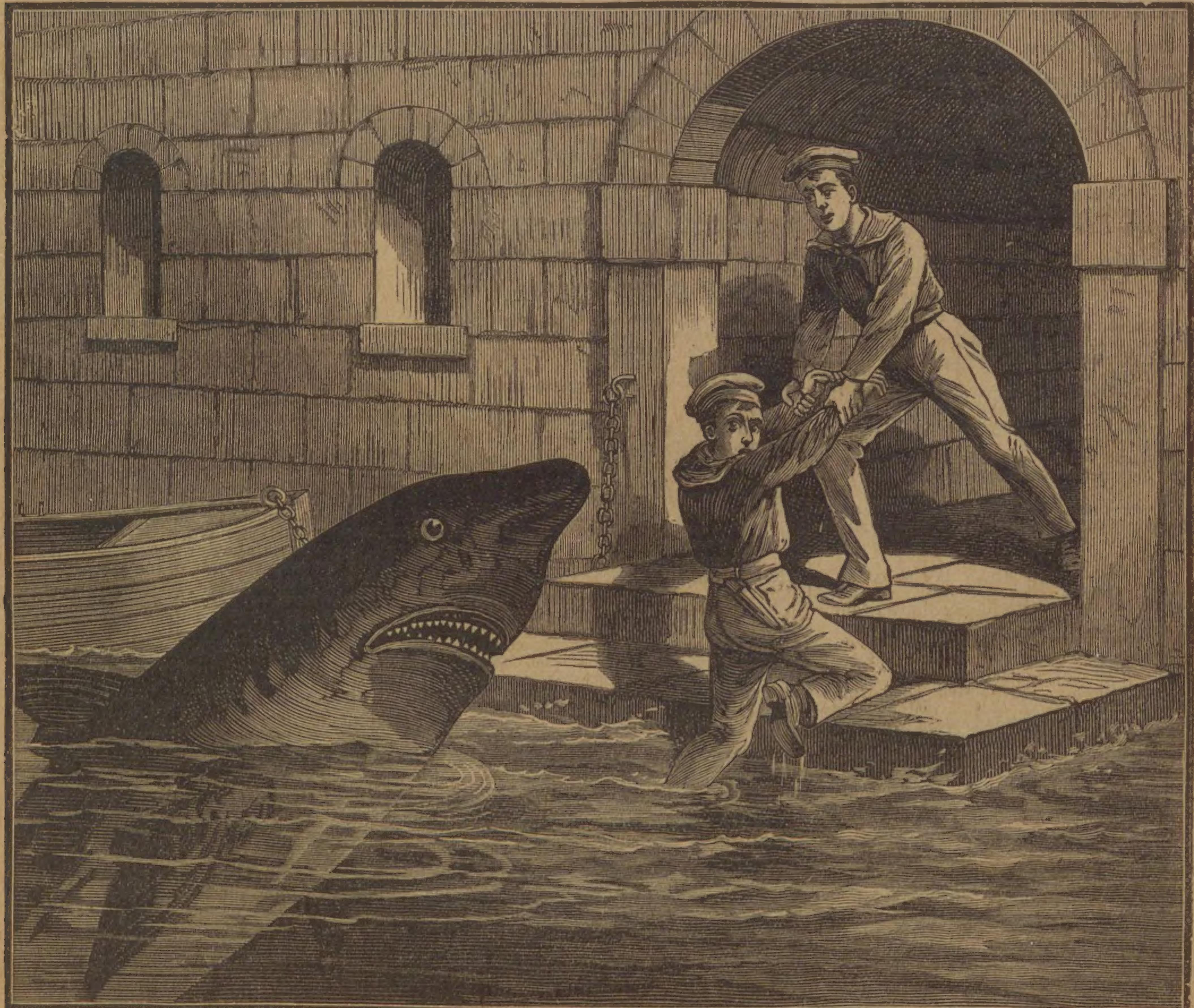
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Vol. II.

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Jack Harkaway, the Avenger.



Three vigorous strokes, and Harry grasps a chain fastened to a staple in the wall to which a boat is moored. He is on the steps. Then grappling with young Jack, he helps him up with a desperate jerk. Just in time.

JACK HARKAWAY

The Avenger.

CHAPTER I.

A HOUSE OF MOURNING—HARVEY'S RESOLVE
—A TIME OF TROUBLE.

"HORRIBLE!" cried Jefferson; "horrible!" Dismay and terror were on every face. The dreadful news paralyzed their movements.

Dick Harvey was the first to break the silence. He sprang to his feet and made for the grounds, motioning the others to follow him.

"Let us try and catch the postman," he exclaimed; "if we get hold of him we may learn something worth knowing."

But the result may be guessed in advance. Not a sign was there of the bearer of this alarming letter.

Crestfallen and disappointed, they returned to the house.

"Come," said Dick, to the bold American; "we must move; we must be stirring."

"What for?"

"For several reasons," replied Dick. "But firstly, for the purpose of giving Jack something to do. It will never do to let a man in his condition brood."

They sought poor Harkaway again and led him off to hold a consultation.

"Jack," said Harvey, briskly, "you must not give way to despondency."

"Do not fear for me, Dick," returned Harkaway. "I shall be better for a little quiet."

"Indeed you'll not. Besides, it is not just to the boys."

Harkaway's lips quivered, and a big lump arose in his throat.

"Don't—don't, old friend," he faltered, in a broken-hearted voice. "I can't bear the mention of their names. Poor boys—poor boys!"

"But you must," insisted Harvey. "I don't mean to leave them in the lurch."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. We must not give up the search."

"Ah, Dick, you would persuade me, if you can't persuade yourself."

"You are wrong," replied Harvey. "I have the deepest conviction on the point."

"To what effect?"

"That they live—both live."

Jack Harkaway looked positively frightened at this reply.

"Dick—Dick," he exclaimed, mournfully, "what are you saying, old friend?"

"What I mean. They yet live," returned Harvey, boldly.

"I should rather say that they were murdered long before we received their last message."

"Come—come, Jack," he said; "arouse yourself, man. Whatever can make you believe this to be true?"

"The letter."

"That is the very first thing to raise my doubts," replied Dick. "Why, we have known Hunston all his life, and never found him anything but the most notorious liar."

Harkaway hung his head and sighed.

"That is not all, Dick," he said; "I have the direst presentiment upon me—"

"Presentiment!" ejaculated Dick, interrupting him. "Well, Jack, I will not quarrel with you about presentiments, since I am urged on to what I am about to say and do by presentiments,—only my presentiments are of the most hopeful description."

"Dick," said Harkaway, looking him straight in the face, "you are trying to deceive me."

"I swear I am not," retorted Harvey, with warmth. "And you shall soon see whether or not I am in earnest."

"I mean that I am going to fetch the boys."

"What wildness are you talking, Dick?" What is this?"

"Simply that to-morrow at daybreak I shall start off on the search."

"Whither?"

"To the mountains."

Harkaway looked frightened at this.

"Not to trust yourself in the brigands' clutches?"

"I mean to beard the tigers in their lair," echoed Dick, firmly; "not a word, Jack," he added, as he saw Harkaway about to interrupt him, "not a word; the worthy Richard Harvey will not go, but his spirit in another skin will go."

"You are never going to trust yourself in a disguise."

"I am."

"Why, Dick, old friend, were you that unhappy man, Protean Bob himself, Hunston would penetrate your disguise; the eye of hate—"

"Nonsense. If I were Protean Bob, Hunston would be too glad not to recognize me."

"Perhaps."

"Now, Jack, you must listen to me and not give advice. My determination is taken; nothing can shake it. Hilda and the family generally must suppose that I have gone to the port to arrange about our departure, since they all appear to be so thoroughly bent upon leaving here."

"But they will never believe a word about it."

"That I cannot help, but at all events I leave here to-morrow at daybreak; and may the shade of one of their victims aid me to throw dust in the eyes of Hunston and the Italian villain, Toro."

"Amen," said Harkaway, seriously.

* * * * *

Surely enough at daybreak, someone set forth from the villa, but although we who are behind the scenes can give a shrewd guess at who it was, the early wanderer looked about as unlike Dick Harvey as you could well imagine.

CHAPTER II.

THE SILK DRESS—MURDER!

THE morning after the interview between Hunston and the widow of Mathias, that woman was missing from the camp.

The sentinels who all night long had guarded each known path leading to or from the bivouac were questioned, but neither of them had seen her depart.

Toro was rather annoyed at this; not that he had any great objection to her slaughtering the whole of the Harkaway family, although he certainly would prefer to perform that task himself. But he could not help thinking that a secret path might admit foes, as well as permit the exit of friends.

However, we must leave Toro to his reflections, and follow the brigand's widow.

It was between one and two in the morning when she quitted the bivouac without being observed, and walked slowly towards the town where the Harkaways were located.

At that hour of the morning she could not hope to gain admittance to the house where her foes were located.

A day must pass and evening come again before anything could be done.

Diana's brain was in a whirl.

Deep-seated, poignant grief for the loss of one whom she had loved with all the passion her impetuous nature was capable of, made the thought and hope of revenge grow stronger and stronger.

As the sun rose, she sat down a little way out of the road and tried to form some connected plan for carrying out her purpose.

But no! her brain was too confused for deep thought, and after a brief interval she resolved to act upon no plan whatever, but simply do as the course of events might dictate.

At about the hour when she thought the inhabitants of the town would begin to stir, Diana walked into the place.

She knew the residence of the Harkaways well, but scarcely glanced at it as she passed and proceeded to a little house not far from it, where, according to an inscription over the door, one might obtain food, drink and lodging.

Entering this place, Diana made a slender meal, and then, telling the ancient dame who kept the house that she was fatigued, demanded to be shown where she could repose for an hour or two.

The old woman ushered her into a small, meanly-furnished apartment at the front of the house.

"Do not disturb me. I will rest till noon, if not later," said Diana.

"You shall not be interrupted," was the response, and Diana was left alone.

A little after noon the woman of the house looked in, and finding her lodger awake, entered into conversation, commencing by suggesting some refreshment.

"Ah, my food is very plain and humble," said the old woman. "I can't give you such dainties as the people over yonder eat."

She jerked her thumb in the direction of the Harkaway residence.

"What people are they?" asked Diana, with an assumed indifference she was far from feeling.

"Some English."

"What do they want here?"

"They have come to destroy the brigands; is it not droll?"

Diana was afraid to exhibit too much interest in the doings of the Harkaways lest she should arouse suspicion.

"So very careless; anyone might get into their house by the side door," said the ancient dame.

"Well, it is their own fault if they are robbed."

"True. But it would be little credit to the robber; they think the brigands are afraid to enter the town, so they don't take many precautions."

The sun set, and darkness began to gather rapidly when she went out, and after going a little way down the street, returned and sought the side door of Harkaway's house.

She turned the handle softly and entered.

There was no one in the kitchen, where she found herself, but the subdued noise of knives and forks in another apartment convinced her that they were at dinner or some other meal.

Diana, as soon as she had ascertained that fact, glided like a specter up the stairs, and noiselessly examined various bedchambers.

At length she decided on hiding herself in one which seemed better furnished than the others.

"This must be it," she thought.

It was Mrs. Harkaway's apartment.

On the dressing-table was a folded paper.

Diana opened it, and found that it was a milliner's bill against Mrs. Harkaway.

"For making a pearl-gray silk dress, etc."

Clutching her sharp dagger firmly in her hand, the vengeful woman concealed herself behind some tapestry and waited.

A light foot was heard without.

The door was opened, and a second afterwards a graceful female form was seated before the mirror, with its back toward Diana.

And a female voice said:

"This pearl-gray silk suits my complexion far better than I thought it would. But it fits me badly. These Greek milliners are not to be compared with those of London or Paris."

Then the wearer of the pearl-gray silk heaved a deep sigh, and Diana softly moved the curtain aside a little to get a view of the person who had spoken.

The face was not visible, but from the figure generally, Diana had not the slightest doubt it was Mrs. Harkaway.

"I want some new jewelry sadly," continued "pearl-gray silk;" "but yet, after all, it would be scarcely safe to wear it here while the brigands are in the neighborhood. But they will soon be done for."

The widow glided out from her hiding place as the wearer of the silk dress continued:

"We have one villain safe enough, and another, Mathias, was smothered in a chimney—ha—ha—ha—ha—oh!"

The laugh ended in a deep groan, and never more came the slightest sound from those lips than a moment before had been so merry.

Diana had struck so hard and surely that no second blow was needed, for the first pierced a human heart.

Like a shadow she glided away, leaving the wearer of the pearl-gray silk sitting motionless before the mirror.

The silk dress soaked with her heart's blood.

A few minutes later someone entered Mrs. Harkaway's apartment, and then arose the fearful cry:

"Help! Murder!"

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG JACK IN TROUBLE—THE COUNCIL—DOOM OF THE BOYS—A SOLDIER'S GRAVE AT DAYBREAK.

YOUNG JACK and Harry Girdwood, who by

their friends are supposed to have been grievously ill-treated, found themselves dragged by rough and brutal hands to a considerable distance from the shore where they had unfortunately landed.

The boy whom young Jack had rescued, and who had decoyed them to their ruin, disappeared at once.

"Jack," said Harry Girdwood, when recovered from the first shock, "we are done for."

"No mistake about that," returned young Jack, gloomily.

"Well—well, it is no fault of ours; that is some consolation."

"A precious poor consolation, since here we are."

"Yes."

Here they were interrupted by their captors.

"Move on!"

The voice was Hunston's, and that sufficed for young Jack to show signs of opposition.

Vain obstacle.

The ruffians were only glad of the slightest pretext for further brutality.

"We are quite comfortable where we are," said young Jack.

"Insolent brat!" said Hunston, contemptuously. "You shall be birched well for that."

The color mounted to the boy's face in spite of himself.

"You can threaten in safety, fellow," said young Harkaway, turning and facing their old enemy, "since you have so many backers to protect you."

Hunston grew livid.

"You wretched spawn of a hated race," he ejaculated between his set teeth, "do you dare speak to me?"

"There is not much daring required," retorted Jack, boldly.

The words were barely uttered when Hunston dealt the boy a buffet which nearly sent him to the earth; but young Jack was pretty prompt in returning it.

This was a kind of debt which the Harkaways were not long in acquitting.

Quick as lightning recovering himself, he turned and leaped upon Hunston, and taking him quite unexpectedly, he toppled him over and fell upon him, clutching him by the throat.

"Now I'll show you what it is to lay your dirty fingers upon a Harkaway," exclaimed the boy, glaring into the other's face.

"Let go—or—"

"My father trounced you before he was my age," cried the boy, excitedly, "and now I'll finish you, that you—"

But he was not allowed to complete his threat. Rough and muscular hands dragged him off.

Else had Hunston fared badly.

It was all momentary, but no sooner had the brigands perceived their comrade to be in danger than they seized hold of the young prisoner and dragged him off.

Hunston sprang to his feet, and knife in hand rushed upon the boy, but the others interfered and placed themselves between the boy and the man.

"Come, Hunston," said one of the men, "let him alone."

"But he has struck me."

"You provoked it."

"What then? Shall I take a blow from such as he?"

"You were wrong to strike a child—a child, too, that is unarmed," answered the brigand.

Hunston hung his head at this way of putting it.

"No matter; he shall die for this."

"Perhaps; but meanwhile there is a possibility of ransom. The interests of the band cannot be allowed to suffer for you or any other individual one of us."

Hunston was silent.

He sheathed his knife, but his silent resolves were not less murderous for being unuttered.

"Lead the way, Simon," said the brigand, who appeared to be chief spokesman.

"Present," said a lithe and wiry man, springing forward.

"Lead on."

Simon stepped onward, and behind him young Jack and Harry were forced to march.

They were walking into captivity, but they could not help themselves; and so they wisely obeyed, so as not to give their captors fresh excuse for further barbarity.

The road which Simon led them was a gloomy and narrow defile, that wound precipitously up among the hills.

It was hardly large enough for five men to walk abreast.

Sometimes the rocks overhung the road, so that the sky was barely visible, and here and there the heavens was altogether obscured, for

they had to walk through tunnels in the solid rock—too solid apparently to have been worked by the hand of man.

On they walked upon this gloomy track, the silence only broken by the echo of their own footfalls.

Anything so desolate our boys had never beheld.

A dull, settled feeling of loneliness and despair fell upon the two boy prisoners.

After journeying in this way for about two miles, they came unexpectedly (to them—for of course Simon, the guide, knew where he was leading the party) upon a circular opening among the hills, beneath which was what appeared to be a table land of dark earth or peat.

"A swamp," said Harry Girdwood.

"It looks like a bog," said young Jack, "but yet I can see something moving."

"It is water."

"A lake?"

"Yes."

"How black—how dismal it looks."

It did, indeed.

Silent and gloomy, like a table of metal, spread the darkling waters of this strange lake.

Wild and desolate was it in the extreme.

On every side it was enclosed by towering heights, bare, treeless and solemn.

Both boys were plainly impressed with the dull solemnity of the scene.

"What does that look like?" said young Jack in a low voice, to his companion.

"I don't know—Lerna, the famous marsh, near Argos?"

"No; it was there that Hercules killed the Hydra, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"I should like to think that it was like that," he said, glancing around at the brigands about them.

"And that you or we might emulate the example of Hercules."

"Ah, yes."

"But our enemies are more than hydra-headed."

The other glanced eagerly about him before he spoke.

"It is a question; I should almost sooner run a good deal of risk than be marched quietly off."

Now at this present juncture there was a signal from the topmost hills, and upon a trumpet-note being blown in answer by one of the brigands, dark, dusky forms appeared upon every side.

Men sprang up in the rocky hills all around the black waters of the lake, as promptly as the kilted savages responded to the summons of their chieftain, Rob Roy Macgregor Campbell.

Whatever wild fancies the two boy prisoners might have had in their minds, this startling phenomenon effectually drove it away.

And fortunate it was, too, for them.

Hunston called a halt.

The men were nothing loth.

The road they had traversed was steep and rugged, and it had perhaps told less upon the two boy prisoners than upon any of the party.

The brigands sat and refreshed.

They made a hearty meal of cold meat and coarse bread and herbs, and they drank of their wine from the skins until their swarthy faces flushed purple; and whilst they feasted and made merry, the captives were constrained to look on—in envy perhaps—but not to share the banquet.

Hunger fell upon them.

But the boys guessed that their sufferings would only give pleasure to their captors, and so they kept their troubles in this particular to themselves.

"Tighten your belt," said Harry Girdwood; "squeeze your stomach, Jack, and don't let these wolves see that we are peckish."

"Not me."

Taking the hint, Jack drew in a reef.

The two young comrades were, in reality, not much improved by this movement; but they thought they were, and imagination goes a great way.

But hunger is an intruder whose importunities there is no denying for any length of time, and so it fell out that in spite of their brave and manful efforts at keeping up each other's pluck and spirit, he gnawed at their vitals in a way which reduced not only their stamina, but their spirits.

"This is to be our prison," said Harry Girdwood, gloomily; "I feared it would be."

"It is rather like the Lethe than anything else," said young Jack, pointing to the silent water below. "If we remain here long, we shall forget all that has gone before, you may be sure."

This is the place to drive us out of our wits more than any place we could imagine."

"Rather the Styx than the Lethe," said Harry; "banish all hope who enter here."

It was indeed a spot to evoke gloomy reflections, and the boys were in a frame of mind to indulge in such.

This place, they found, was fixed upon as the camp of the brigands, who had felt it imperative to change their headquarters, since they had positive proof that their old stronghold was known to their enemies.

Here they were not in danger of surprise, for their men commanded every outlet, and it must be a rare chance to take them by surprise.

Within a couple of hours of the arrival there of the two boy prisoners and their captors, the whole of the band sauntered down in twos and threes, until the vast host that they formed fairly amazed young Jack and his companion.

"Let us fix a sum upon them," said Toro, "so that their parents and friends may release them if they wish."

This was approved of by one and all of his hearers.

There was only a single dissentient voice.

This was Hunston's.

"If you attempt to temporise," he said, "you will be beaten, for sure."

"Why?"

"Beaten by whom?"

"Harkaway."

"Bah!"

"Such is my experience of him," returned Hunston.

"Nonsense; why shouldn't we make sure of the money if we can?"

"Why not?" said Hunston; "if we can, which I doubt."

"Harkaway is a most affectionate parent, I know well," said Ymeniz; "I have heard it from a dozen different sources. Once let him know that his son and the other boy are in danger, and he will pay any money for their release."

"Well," said Toro, "let us say five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred?"

"Yes."

"Not enough."

"How much is five hundred pounds?" demanded Ymeniz.

"Twelve thousand, five hundred francs," replied Toro.

"Very good—very good; a fair price."

"Is it not?"

"How shall we claim it?"

This question was put to the assembled council generally, and answered eagerly by Hunston.

"Let me do that."

"Very good, Hunston; be yours that task."

"But remember our old friend Tomaso is still in the power of these cursed English."

Toro paused, and from all the band arose the unanimous cry:

"Tomaso must be rescued or avenged!"

Hunston addressed himself to the business with considerable interest.

It is not necessary for me to go through the correspondence which took place, nor to dilate upon the ingenious manner in which the letters were delivered by Hunston or his emissaries.

With his wonted shrewdness, he watched for the result of his last threatening letter himself, and after making the most careful observations, he descended to the appointed spot and fetched the letter containing the money.

The five hundred pounds were there, in five Bank of England notes of one hundred each.

"Five hundred pounds," he said, his vicious eyes glistening as he touched the crisp, new notes; "five hundred pounds! Heaven, what a sum."

He looked about him.

He was alone.

Not a soul in sight.

"Why should I share it?" he said; "why should it not all be mine?"

Why, indeed?

Because he feared his lawless companions.

Nothing more.

"I'll take up a hundred, one hundred," he muttered, half aloud, "and this shall serve a double purpose. The four hundred shall remain mine, and the one hundred theirs. But seeing that they can get nothing out of Harkaway, they will be the more easily worked upon, and I shall achieve all I want at one stroke; a noble notion."

Back he went, and then began a comedy which Hunston went through like a veteran actor, a comedy that was destined to have a tragic finale.

"Toro," said Hunston to the Italian, "to you I may speak as the leader of these brave fellows; also to you, comrades in general, I may talk

without fear of my motives being in any way misconstrued."

"Speak on."

"Here is the reply of the cold-blooded Englishman Harkaway to my demand for ransom, and you are all my witness that I did not exact a very unreasonable sum."

"No—no."

"What says he?"

"He sends this," returned Hunston, holding up a single hundred-pound note; "one hundred pounds, two thousand five hundred francs; in a word, one-fifth of the sum we demanded, and with it a letter."

A murmur of indignation followed.

"What does the letter say?" they demanded.

"He defies us; he offers this sum, but says that if the boys are not released before sunrise, he will come and fetch them."

"Let him come."

"So say I; but what shall be done with the boys meanwhile?"

A momentary silence followed; then came the deep, stern words:

"Let them die!"

The speaker was Toro.

The Italian's words were eagerly caught up.

"Ay, let them die! but when?"

"When you will," said Hunston; "I care not, so that we are rid of them. We see clearly that there is no counting upon these Harkaway people for the ransom set down by us, however reasonable our demands may be."

"True."

"Then I say, let them die to-day."

"Impossible," said one of the brigands, stepping forth.

"Why?"

"Because the traitor, Lirico, is to die at daybreak; we can't have two executions so near to each other. Let them all die together."

"Lirico?" said Hunston; "and why has he to die? I haven't heard in what he has offended."

"A hateful thing," was the reply of his informant; "Lirico has offended against the foundation rule of the band."

"How?"

"He has kept to himself the booty he has gained, and our law is that any member of the band who shall conceal his booty, or any part or fragment of the same, to the prejudice of his comrades and fellows, shall die the death of a traitor."

Hunston was silent.

But had anybody been watching him closely then, they would have noticed that he changed color.

It was an unpleasant topic to tackle the English ruffian upon, after all that had just taken place.

"Why so silent, comrade?" said an old brigand named Boulgaris, staring Hunston full in the face; "do you not approve?"

"Of what?"

"Of the law."

"I—of course."

"Of course you do," said Boulgaris, boldly; "why, you would be the first to approve. Who could approve more of such a law than you, honest Hunston?"

"Who, indeed?"

Hunston winced under the cool scrutiny of the Greek.

Did he know aught about what had taken place?

The idea was utterly absurd.

He (Hunston) had taken too much care that he was not observed for any vulgar pryer like Boulgaris to find a corner from which to spy upon his movements.

Still it gave him a qualm.

"Quite right," said Hunston, boldly; "quite right and just; any man who can play false to his fellows deserves to die the death."

"Hear—hear! Let him die," said the brigands.

"And the two boys shall die with him?" asked Boulgaris.

"They shall, at daybreak."

This was put to the assembled throng, and agreed to by all, when suddenly a single dissentient voice was heard:

"They shall not die."

The brigands looked up, and a boy appeared upon the scene, the boy who had lured the luckless lads to their present unlucky pitch.

"Theodora."

"Ay, Theodora," responded the boy—or rather girl—for a girl it was, as you have long since discovered, although in male attire.

"And why shall they not die, Theodora?" asked Hunston.

"Ask rather why they should die?" she said, sadly. "What have they done to merit death?"

"Haloo—haloo!" ejaculated Toro. "Why,

whatever is the meaning of this change of tone? I thought that you, like all others, were most eager for revenge."

"Why?"

"Why? Need I already remind you of the ample cause for vengeance which we all have?"

"No," returned Theodora, calmly. "But these boys are innocent of harm."

"Then why did you lure them to their destruction?"

The woman sighed.

"Ah, why indeed?"

"Yes, why?"

"I was wicked, cruel, base, deceptive," she replied; "words cannot paint my wickedness. But I was punished for my badness by peril such as I have never yet known; and when really running a danger which I thought but to affect the better to lure our destined victims to their doom, I was rescued from the grave by them, by the very boys—brave—brave boys—whom I sought to destroy. Now," she added, turning boldly to the assembled brigands, "can you ask me why I have changed my tone?"

A dozen voices were heard at once, and all uttered different sentiments.

"These prisoners are mine by right," said Theodora, "for I have taken them. I have brought them here; it is for me to dispose of them."

Some few of the brigands agreed to this; but the majority, overruled by Toro and Hunston, denied her jurisdiction altogether in the matter.

The girl made a passionate appeal to the assembled brigands. But all in vain.

They were resolved.

It was put to the vote, and the result was easily foreseen.

Death.

Death by the majority of voices, as of ten to one.

"Death at the gibbet," exclaimed Hunston, triumphantly.

"Ay—ay."

"Nay," cried the girl, with superhuman energy, "these two poor boys have shown themselves better men than most here present. See how they bear their fate. Be men, then, and if they must die, let them die like soldiers."

An incisive discussion ensued on this, and finally it was agreed that the helpless boys should die next morning with the traitor Lirico.

CHAPTER IV.

QUALMS—THE EVE OF THE END—A SAD VIGIL.

HUNSTON did not close his eyes throughout the night.

The words of Boulgaris rang in his ear like a knell.

Lirico was to die for concealing a part of the spoil which he had made.

What of the four hundred pounds which he, Hunston, had kept back out of the sum fixed upon for the ransom of the two boys, and which Harkaway had deposited in the spot agreed upon?

He knew the desperate men he had cast his lot with far too well to suppose for a moment that there could be any hope for him did they chance to discover his secret.

Would they?

The bare possibility of it made him shudder.

His hand nervously sought the hidden notes, which were concealed in his breast, and the faintest rustle of the crisp new paper caused his cheek to pale.

Once he dozed off, but barely were his eyes closed ere he was troubled by dreams that caused him to toss about and moan as if in great bodily pain, and when he awoke, he dare not try to sleep again, so he arose and went to look at the prisoners.

The two unfortunate boys were awake and talking to the now disconsolate author of all their trouble, the disguised girl whom they had lost themselves in saving.

"Haloo, madame," exclaimed Hunston, brutally, "what do you do here, talking with the condemned brats?"

"I am seeking to comfort them," replied the girl; "to prepare them for the butchers."

"Butchers! Humph!"

"I mean you and those who are persuaded by you."

"No matter; you had better leave them now to themselves."

"At whose command?" demanded the woman, drawing herself up proudly.

"At mine," returned Hunston, who was fast losing his temper.

"What, you dare!" ejaculated the girl, with flashing eyes.

"Dare!" laughed Hunston. "Will you go away and leave the boys alone, or must I carry you away?"

The girl's color forsook her cheek, and she drew nearer to Hunston, and the latter, startled at her expression, drew back.

"These unhappy boys are doomed to die at daybreak," she said, "but if you stay a moment longer to molest me or annoy them, I will summon the men and tell them that you would insult me and murder them."

"It is false."

"I know it," replied the woman, fiercely; "but do you suppose I would hesitate at that? And what would your life be worth?—what, I ask? Why, they would wait for no explanation; your presence here would be sufficient; they would tear you asunder. Begone, craven blackheart. Go!"

Hunston muttered something indistinctly, but he bent his head before the storm of this fierce woman's wrath and slunk away.

She turned to the boys.

"My poor fellows," she said, tenderly, her manner changing as if by magic, "my unfortunate, brave lads, what can I do for you?"

"You have earned our gratitude," returned Harry Girdwood, "by the whipping you gave that cur."

"Indeed you have," chimed in young Jack, with warmth.

"How like a beaten hound he looked," said the woman. "But how can I ever hope to be forgiven by you?"

"We have nothing to forgive," said young Jack, generously.

"Ay, but you have; you saved my life and I take yours."

"Not you."

"I am the cause of it indirectly."

"Perhaps; but at any rate, the innocent cause."

The girl's distress at this was painful to witness.

She had conceived a great affection for the two boys, her youthful preservers, and she could not tell them how far she was guilty.

She dare not avow that she had started out upon that risky trip to sea with the intention of simulating the peril which afterwards became too real, and so decoying the two boys as she had done.

No; she dare not avow this.

She had soon repented of her share in that black business.

Soon—ay, but that soon was all too late.

Too late!

The thought wrung her heart and she bent her head and wept.

"This is very painful," said young Jack.

"It is, Jack," said his comrade, in a broken voice. "I don't like to see a boy crying."

They were still ignorant of their friend's real sex.

* * * * *

"What is that?"

"What?"

"Don't you hear?"

"I do; it sounds like some heavy instrument beating the earth close at hand."

"Yes, like digging."

The three started at the word.

No sooner was it uttered than the meaning of it struck them all three, and sent a chill to their very hearts.

Digging at that fatal hour, so short a time before daybreak, could have but one significance.

Grave-making; and if the two hapless boys quailed at that awful sound, can we accuse them of cowardice?

No.

Assuredly not.

Who among the bravest could listen to such a sound unmoved?

To have been callous to such a thing would have shown them mere senseless logs, nothing more.

"You know what that is?" she said, in a faint voice.

"We do," responded Harry Girdwood, gravely.

"And you?"

This was to young Jack.

"Yes."

The reply of both was given in a grave voice befitting such a solemn occasion.

Yet their voices never trembled, never faltered.

She understood them well, and her expression showed clearly as words the admiration she felt for their courage.

"I am glad that you know the worst," she said, in a low but impressive tone, "for the un-

pleasant task of telling you is not left for me. Have you anything to say before—" "No."

"All that I would say," remarked young Jack, "that since they mean assassinating us, I hope that they will do their work cleanly, and not put us to torture."

"At the worst," added his companion, "we shall not give them the satisfaction of seeing us beg and pray for mercy."

"It would be useless."

"We know it."

"And so shall not give them the chance of saying that two Englishmen showed the white feather."

"Bravely spoken," said the girl, "but the night is growing old, and so listen to what I have to say."

And then she made a communication which considerably startled them.

At first they listened as though in a dream, for they could not believe in the reality of what she said; but they were not sorry to believe in its truth.

The nature of this communication will appear later on.

"And now," she said, solemnly, "the time is short. I must insist upon your sleeping. Rest, and I will watch by your side. A friendly voice at least, shall call you for the last dreadful trial of all."

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIPLE EXECUTION—A SOLDIER'S GRAVE—TORO'S LUCK.

MORNING dawned.

The eastern sky was only just tinged with the light of the rising sun when the bugle call summoned the firing party.

The party in question was composed of six men commanded by Hunston.

He had insisted upon having this post, one that none of the brigands envied him—so that he might gloat over his victims at the last hour.

The two boys were aroused with some difficulty, for strange though it may appear, they were sleeping soundly when the fatal moment approached.

"Come," said the girl, in a hollow voice. "Lirico is already on the ground."

"We mustn't be behindhand, then," said young Jack, springing up.

"No," added Harry Girdwood; "they must see how Englishmen can face death."

And then led by the girl, who had, to her sorrow, brought them to this dire pass, they came to the spot where the tragedy was to take place.

Lirico, the traitor, was already pinioned, and he stood with his eyes bandaged upon the edge of the grave which was shortly to receive his lifeless body.

Upon either side of this was a newly-dug trench or grave.

One of these was for young Jack.

The other was for his stout-hearted comrade.

They needed no telling what to do now; but each went through his part in the horrible ceremony as though it had been previously rehearsed.

Not a word was spoken.

The only signs of emotion which the boys exhibited were when they silently wrung each other's hands before taking their places before their graves.

The girl passed before each of the unhappy victims and shook them by the hand one after the other.

"Courage," she said, in a low but firm voice, "courage, brave hearts."

"Bandage their eyes," said Hunston.

"No; let us look upon our fate," said young Jack.

"The old Harkaway brag to the very last," said Hunston, with a sneer.

"You don't like to look a Harkaway in the face, assassin!" retorted the boy.

"Fool!" exclaimed Hunston, "since you want it, you shall have it. Fire at the middle first. They can have an opportunity of seeing a real man die before their eyes. It may give them a relish for their own share to follow."

The word was given.

"Ready! Present! Fire!"

The six rifles flashed simultaneously.

Then, as the wounded Lirico was struck, he bounded into the air and fell back into the grave—stone dead!

Hunston stood smiling grimly, even while the very men turned sick at the butchery they were forced to enact.

He, with fiend-like satisfaction, noticed the sickly pallor of the two boys' faces, and it gladdened his black heart.

"They aren't quite so happy now," he muttered. "Now it is they suffer. Oh, if Harkaway were here, too. It would make me drunk with joy."

The girl turned to young Jack.

"Courage," she whispered, "courage; be bold."

And then turning to the firing party, she said:

"Come, do not delay. It is needless to prolong the sufferings which these poor boys feel already."

"Silence, and begone!" exclaimed Hunston, fiercely. "You have no right to speak to the men."

"I have every right," returned the woman, boldly. "Silence yourself, I say, and know your place!"

Her voice and manner half awed Hunston, who fell back a pace or two.

"My poor comrades," she went on, addressing the firing party, "this work is not to your taste. I'll load for you."

So saying, she set to work to reload the rifles which were piled now.

And she observed the very greatest care in this task.

"Not a shot must miss," she said to the men of the firing party, earnestly. "Every bullet must have its billet. We have to murder, but even then not to torture these unhappy boys."

Hunston smiled sardonically.

"How very tender-hearted you have become," he said, with a sneer of contempt.

"Silence!" said the girl, turning fiercely upon him, so that he actually quailed before her indignant gaze. "Silence, I tell you, bully—butcher—villain—silence!"

Hunston would have retorted to this, but prudence bade him be silent.

For the girl was a great favorite with all the men, and he feared that they might take up the cudgels for her in a way which might be unpleasant for him.

"So, young Harkaway," he said, jeeringly, "you wish to see it all go before you. It prolongs your pleasure, and so I can't complain. This one next."

He pointed with his sword to Harry Girdwood.

The latter looked deadly pale but resolute.

"Ready! Present! Fire!"

Young Jack turned half around and saw his brave comrade clap his hand to his breast, totter and fall.

A cry arose to his lips.

But he stifled it ere Hunston could have this small gratification.

Hunston looked around at young Jack, and he positively bit his lips with sheer vexation to find that he was unable to make the boy betray the least sign of fear.

"You keep it up well, boy," said Hunston, "but I know well that you are ready to sink through the ground with fear, nevertheless."

"Liar!"

Hunston flushed purple.

But he kept down his rage.

"As you are going to die, boy, I may let you off the birching which your impertinence merits. You have all the old brag of your father."

Jack was silent.

"All his deceit; all his sham and falseness—"

The boy said nothing.

"All his craven hearted, black-hearted villainy!"

But young Jack saw through the other's game clearly enough.

He held his peace.

He knew well enough that the real way to enrage the ruffian was to appear unmoved at his taunts.

So when Hunston exhausted his expletives and was about to give the word to the firing party, young Jack spoke.

"One moment."

Hunston made the men a sign to ground arms.

The boy was about to beg for mercy.

Here, then, there was one chance of wreaking his spite upon the lad.

Now he should be able to feast his ears with the unhappy boy's piteous appeals, for he well judged that once he began to plead for pity, all his fortitude would go.

"Before they fire," said young Jack, pale but resolute, as his comrade, Harry, had just shown himself, "one word."

"Go on."

"I can speak as one on the brink of the grave," said the boy, "and so my words may be prophetic. Before many weeks are over, you shall kneel and sue for mercy to my father, and it will be denied to you. You will grovel in the dirt and crawl and cringe in abject misery; but it

will be hopeless, and in the bitterness of your despair you will think of this moment, and curse the hour you ever molested one of my race, or anyone in whom we are interested."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Hunston, in a boisterous and forced manner; "quite a sermon. Preaching is a new quality in the Harkaways. It is unfortunate that you are to be cut off in your early youth. You would soon blossom into an odd mixture of Puritan and bully."

But he could not provoke his victim.

Having said all he had to say, young Jack coolly folded his arms and awaited the end of the tragedy, apparently not hearing what Hunston was saying.

* * * * *

"Make ready! Present! Fire!"

As the word was spoken, the volley was fired. The unhappy boy—the last of three victims—threw up his arms, and fell back into the new-made grave yawning to receive him.

Poor young Jack!

The body did not even quiver after it had fallen into the grave.

Apparently death had been instantaneous.

"Fill in the graves and cover up the carrion," said Hunston; "and then let us get away and make merry."

The girl stepped up and interposed herself.

"Begone, and leave the rest to me," she said.

"To you?"

"Ay."

"What for?"

"It was so agreed," said one of the men.

"Let us pray for them, now," said the girl. "Surely, having destroyed their bodies you do not wish them any further harm."

She waited for no reply, but falling upon her knees, was soon lost in holy meditation, her hands clasped fervently, her head bent upon her breast.

The men doffed their hats reverently and glided noiselessly away.

Hunston feared to shock their superstitious susceptibilities, and so he followed them in silence.

* * * * *

For several hours she was left to her meditations.

And when, some hours later in the day, Hunston returned to the spot, the three graves were filled in.

Over those of the two unhappy lads some pious hands had raised a rough wooden cross.

"The first to taste our vengeance," muttered Hunston.

"May the others soon follow," said a voice at his elbow.

He started.

It was Toro.

"This is the turn of our luck," said the Italian, exultantly.

"I hope so."

"I feel it is so. The rest of the hated race will soon follow, if we have the least good fortune."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRIGANDS' RECRUIT—HUNSTON'S PERIL—DELICATE GROUND.

"Who is it?"

"Where?"

"Below; down that crevasse. Look again."

"I see; it is Ymeniz."

"It is—it is."

The speakers were two of the brigands who were plying their lawless trade, and passing along a mountain ridge, a short time after the execution, they suddenly espied the body of a man lying flat upon his back.

Upon his breast was something white which they could not quite distinguish.

The form and features, however, they had no particular difficulty in recognizing.

It was their comrade Ymeniz, they could see well.

"He has fallen down there," said one to the other.

"It looks so."

Now, strange to relate, that although they said this to each other, they both had misgivings.

The body lay in such a strange attitude.

However, they soon proceeded to solve the problem, and set all doubts at rest.

Passing down to a lower ridge by a circuitous path well known to them both, they reached the bottom of the crevasse.

"He is dead—murdered!"

"Hah!"

"And here, by all the powers of evil," ex-

claimed the brigand, "here is the confession of the murderer!"

"A confession!" exclaimed the brigand.

"Yes. Take it," said the other, lifting the paper from the blood-stained breast of the slain Ymeniz, "take it and read for yourself."

"Nay, you know I am no scholar; do you read it out to me."

"Good."

In a sonorous voice the brigand read the following document:

"I, Jack Harkaway, proclaim war to the knife against the murderers of my boys. The villains Hunston and Toro will tell you all that I never threaten in vain. One of your number shall die daily until I have exterminated you root and branch. No amount of precaution upon your part can avert your doom. You claimed a ransom of five hundred pounds for my son. I have paid the sum demanded, and you have played me false; therefore, you die. To the last man you shall perish. You shall learn to look forward to your fate in fear and trembling; and day by day the survivors, anticipating their turn, shall learn to curse the hour that they were led to murder my two innocent boys. Beware!"

The two brigands looked at each other half-scared.

"What of that, do you think?"

The other looked nervously around him before replying.

"It is grave."

"Very."

"Poor Ymeniz! He has been stabbed in the back."

"No; here is the death wound below the heart."

"Then he has not been taken by surprise."

"Evidently."

The two men made their way with all dispatch to their camp, carrying the paper with them.

The sensation it caused is indescribable when Boulgaris read it aloud to the assembled brigands.

"Death to the Englishman Harkaway!" exclaimed one of the brigands, impetuously.

The cry was caught eagerly up by all—save one.

This one was Hunston.

It was not that he hated Harkaway less intensely than his comrades that he remained silent.

It was simply that in his fierce denunciation of the brigands, Harkaway had told about the money.

Lirico was barely cold in his grave for an offense which, beside that of Hunston's, was mere paltry pilfering.

The secret was in great danger now.

If they should believe Harkaway, then his (Hunston's) position was indeed critical.

What should he do?

What would be better than to cast doubt and derision upon Harkaway's dark menaces?

"The man is a charlatan, a humbug," he said, curling his lip; "and his purpose is more than accomplished could he but know it, which he does not, I am glad to say. He would laugh rarely could he but know what an alarm you have taken at his message."

But they would not let this pass unchallenged.

"It is no joke, Hunston," said Boulgaris, seriously.

"How do you know?" demanded Hunston, quickly.

"The death of Ymeniz is proof enough. That is no joke."

"True."

"Moreover, I for one feel sure that this Englishman, Harkaway, speaks truly."

"How?"

"In saying that he gave the ransom."

"In full?"

"In full."

"Why, where, then, do you think it is?" demanded Hunston, with an assumption of boldness, yet trembling as he awaited the reply.

Boulgaris answered with a single word:

"Stolen!"

A murmur ran around the assembled throng.

"What!" cried one of the brigands, stepping forward; "is it possible that we have more thieves and traitors amongst us?"

"Never!"

"Death to all traitors, say I!"

"And I."

"And I."

And so the cry went around from mouth to mouth.

Hunston trembled for his very life.

"Who can have stolen the money?" demanded one of the men, fiercely.

"Who but he who was charged to fetch the money from the old well, the spot appointed—who but the comrade that fetched the money?"

"Why," exclaimed Toro, turning to Hunston, "then it was—"

He paused.

Hunston turned heartsick as every eye was directed towards him.

"Never!" exclaimed Hunston, fiercely. This was a critical moment for the latter. Very critical.

For awhile his life hung upon a thread.

Hunston, to begin with, was no favorite.

They would have been overjoyed to discover anything against him which they could lay hold of.

He knew this well.

But he was a lucky villain.

At the very moment that matters were looking so very unpleasant, their attention was called off in another direction.

"Do you hear that? The sentry is giving the alarm."

"Where?"

"Below."

They were all accustomed to danger, and were on the *qui vive* ere the alarm was fairly sounded.

Pistols, knives, and blunderbusses were called into requisition.

And all was ready to give an intruder a warm reception.

Toro climbed up a crag and peered over.

Then turning to the men, he motioned them to silence.

"Hush! He comes this way. Back!"

And then, at a sign from him, every man glided quickly, silently off, and concealed himself behind a rock, or bush, or wherever a favorable place was to be discovered,

In a trice the place was clear.

Then a stumbling noise was heard, and a man crept through a gap and hobbled on to the scene.

He was a strange, wild-looking fellow, with long, fair hair and eyebrows almost as light as an albino's.

His cheeks were fair, but much sunburnt, and almost destitute of beard.

He progressed with difficulty, and leaned heavily upon a staff cut roughly from a tree, and from its green bark and slovenly-stripped branches only recently cut, too.

He was apparently a young man, and if he progressed with so much difficulty, the natural inference was that fatigue and perhaps illness was the cause of it.

He was dressed in a very tattered outlandish costume.

He carried a long knife stuck in his waistband, but he had no arms beyond this.

His arms were bare to the elbow, and the left one was bleeding from a flesh wound that did not look many hours old.

Evidently he was no milksop, for although the wound was pretty severe, the only care he had taken was to tie it loosely up with a strip of white rag.

Perhaps he had lost blood and began to feel it, for, as he drew into the open, he dropped heavily down upon a rocky seat, and gave a sigh or grunt of relief.

"I'm not sorry to come to an anchor," he muttered.

He spoke in English.

But if he thought to rest here in peace, he was destined to be disappointed.

Barely had he stretched out his legs, when he was startled by a sound at his side, and glancing up, he found a huge, black muzzled fellow towering above him, and covering him with a long-barreled horse pistol.

"Halloo!"

Out came his long knife instanter.

"Move or speak, and I pull the trigger!" said the brigand.

"Thank you for nothing," said the stranger.

"Who are you?" demanded the brigand.

"Just what I was about to ask you," returned the stranger, lightly.

"Whence come you?"

"Precisely the question I was going to put."

The brigand's color came, and he grew vicious.

"If you are wise, you'll not try to fool me," he said.

"If you have any wit," retorted the new-comer, "you'll not come pestering me with questions; I'm not in the humor, and when I'm put out, I'm dangerous. Good morning."

The brigand, finding he could get nothing out of this eccentric stranger, fell back a pace or two, and the latter thought that he was to be molested no further.

He was mistaken.

Nor was he long in making this discovery.

The withdrawal of the brigand was a signal

for a regular mob of the lawless men to make their appearance.

Every nook and cranny about the opening was guarded by armed men; and now, when the cool stranger glanced upwards, he found a dozen rifles, pistols or blunderbusses pointed at him.

Still he did not appear disconcerted.

He only glanced about him with a coolness that was remarkable, and muttered:

"Dear—dear, how very attentive these dear boys are."

Before he could speak to them, however, they stepped out from their hiding places, and with their firearms still making him their target, they advanced to close in upon him.

When he saw the object of this maneuver, he jumped up and plucked out his knife.

"So—so," he cried, "sold, eh? Come on, all of you."

"What does he say?" demanded one of the Greeks, turning to Toro.

"He challenges us all at once to fight him."

"Why, the fellow's mad or an Englishman."

"Yes," said Hunston, "an Englishman. That makes him feel he is a match for a mob of Greeks, and I don't know that it is all madness."

Suddenly the stranger appeared to liven up.

"What; you are not the police, then?" he ejaculated.

"Police!" said Hunston, contemptuously turning around to the speaker. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, I took you for the police in pursuit of me."

"What have you been doing?"

"Am I among friends?"

"We are brigands, but you can speak freely."

"Well, then, I am an unlucky wretch who has been forced to bolt away from his master and his living—and all for nothing."

"What do you call for nothing?" said Toro.

"A trifling peccadillo, sir; nothing more, I assure you—merely a few pounds and a paltry bit of jewelry belonging to an Englishwoman of the name of Harkaway."

They all pricked up their ears at this name.

"Halloo—halloo!" exclaimed Toro; "what is this? Stand forward, man. Do you know Harkaway?"

"I do—to my sorrow," replied the man; "he was my master."

The brigands all pricked up their ears at this.

"Harkaway's servant, were you?" said Hunston, eagerly.

"I was, sir."

"And what may be your object in coming here?"

"To join you."

"Do you know—?"

"Who you are? Yes, of course; at least I can guess it—I'm uncommon good at guessing."

And he chuckled again.

"The fellow's an idiot," said Hunston.

"Do you bring any information to us?"

This question was put by the Italian bully and brigand; and to him the stranger turned with an elaborate bow.

"What do you want?"

"To get hold of Harkaway himself," cried Toro.

"Then I can help you to do this."

"You can? Then money shall be yours," cried Toro.

"I hope so; why, I've got that already from them."

"You have—much?"

"A pretty lump. Look."

It was a bag of money composed of pieces of copper, silver and gold.

It was a good round sum, and it looked considerably more than it was.

"Is that all?"

"I have these few nicknacks," added the stranger, producing a bundle tied in his pocket-handkerchief.

They tore open the bundle eagerly, and it was found to contain various articles of plate, a silver candlestick, and some jewels.

"Those," he said, pointing to the latter, "belonged to Mrs. Harkaway, and I believe she set some store by them—they were wedding presents."

"So much the better," exclaimed Toro, exultingly.

"So say I," added Hunston.

"Is all this a fair amount for a fellow to bring as his entrance fee?" demanded the stranger.

"What say you, comrades?" demanded Toro, of the bystanders; "you are the best judges. Shall we take this man in as a brother and a comrade?"

"We will," shouted the brigands.

"Agreed on all hands?" said the Italian chief.

"Agreed."

It was answered as if with a single voice.

"Good," said Toro; "do you, Boulgaris, prescribe the oath."

The oath, which was administered in Greek, was not at all understood by the novice, but he subscribed to it cheerfully.

"You swear to devote your life to the destruction of your enemies," said Hunston.

"I do," responded the new brigand, with fervor.

"Enough. What is your name?"

"Geoffrey Martin."

"Geoffrey Martin," repeated Toro: "the name has a ring about it that I like. Now understand, the end of the Harkaways draws near; one has already paid the forfeit."

"Who?" cried the stranger.

"Two!" said a voice.

The brigands turned and beheld Diana, the widow of Mathias.

"Two have already fallen, for I myself struck the wife of this hated Harkaway to the heart with my dagger," cried the fierce woman.

And she then recounted (as we have done in a previous chapter) how she gained admittance to the Harkaway mansion, concealed herself in Mrs. Harkaway's chamber, and dealt the fatal blow.

To all this the brigands' new recruit listened calmly enough.

When, with an air of triumph, Diana concluded her narration, the brigands cheered loudly.

"Another of our hated foes dead. Three cheers for the brave Diana!"

"Certainly," said Geoffrey Martin, politely.

And his voice was heard in the general shout.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, when silence was once more restored, "allow me to correct one very slight error in the statement of this good and valorous lady."

"What is that?" demanded Toro.

"Her narrative is quite correct, with this exception—it was not Mrs. Harkaway who was killed."

Diana turned pale, and uttering a wail of disappointment, sat down.

Hunston, after venting a few fearful imprecations, said:

"Then I hope and trust it may have been the wife of that confounded Harvey."

"It was not, and to tell you the truth, I am rather glad of it, for, do you know, I have almost fallen in love with her?"

"Cheek!" muttered Hunston. "Well, who was it, then?"

"You must know I was waiting on them at the dinner table, when Mrs. Harkaway expressed a wish that her fan, which she had forgotten, might be brought.

"I was going to call some of the female servants, but Harkaway himself went, and before he had gone a minute, we heard him scream out: "Help! Murder!"

Away rushed Harvey and that long American fellow, Jefferson, while Mrs. Harkaway fainted.

"But in a few minutes the three came back with the news that Mrs. Harkaway's maid—Marietta by name—had been killed.

"No fault of yours, madame, for the girl had been dressing herself in some of Mrs. Harkaway's clothes, and no doubt looked as much like a lady as her mistress."

"What then?" demanded Diana.

"The police took the matter in hand, and are now searching for the murderer."

"Let them search," said Diana, with a scornful laugh.

There was silence for a time; then Diana asked:

"Did you hear anything of Tomaso?"

"Yes. He is condemned to die."

"When?" demanded Toro.

"The date is kept secret, so that you may have less chance of rescuing him."

Toro growled an oath and departed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RECRUIT WORKS BRAVELY—HARKAWAY'S VENGEANCE—"HE NEVER FORGETS A DEBT."

The brigands soon found that they had made an invaluable acquisition in their new recruit.

The day following his admission into their honorable fraternity, he brought in an addition to his already handsome booty.

This was in the shape of a lady's reticule containing a rich prize in money, and more jewels.

"I came across my late mistress," said Geoffrey Martin in explanation; "she had ventured out of the town with her new maid, and so I

fleeced them royally. I did not leave them a stiver; moreover, I secured this."

So saying, he spread out before them a newly-printed placard, which translated, ran as nearly as possible in this wise:

"FIVE THOUSAND FRANCS REWARD will be paid to the police or to any private person, who will secure, or give such information as may lead to the capture of one Geoffrey Martin, lately a valet in the service of Mr. John Harkaway."

Then followed a description of his person, walk, and mode of speech.

"The said Geoffrey Martin having absconded with a large sum of money, besides property of great value, it is the duty of every man to aid in bringing him to justice."

He chose a good moment for bringing this paper in.

"Five thousand francs reward," he said to his newly-made comrades generally; "you have only to turn me over to the Harkaways, and you can make a small fortune."

"You'll only find good men and true here," said Hunston.

Geoffrey Martin turned upon the latter.

"All?"

There was a hidden significance in his tone which thrilled Hunston.

"I am glad that they are all safe, friend; by the way, what is your name? I haven't heard it yet."

"My name is Hunston, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"No, of course, you wouldn't be; so you are Hunston?" he added, reflectively.

"Did you know my name?"

"Yes."

"Indeed. Heard your master speak of me, I suppose?"

"Yes; Harkaway and his friend Harvey."

"Harvey," said Hunston, contemptuously, "a paltry, frivolous fool."

"Yes; wasn't he? You should hear him speak of you."

"There was never any love lost between us," said Hunston, moodily; "we hated each other most cordially from boyhood."

"Know him so long?" said Martin.

"We were at school together, and at college together," said Hunston.

"College—phew! then you must have been a swell."

"Well," he said haughtily, "and what of that?"

"Oh, nothing; I was only thinking."

"What were you thinking?"

"Why, if I had half your chance of getting on in life, you would never have found me here."

"What do you mean? Are you ashamed of your comrades?"

"No—no, not me," said Martin; "but I should be if I was you. You're a swell, and it's an awful drop for you. I'm only a poor devil—a nobody, and it's a rise in life for me to join your honorable company; give us your hand."

And then before he could say yea or nay, the new recruit seized Hunston by the hand and wrung it with real or affected warmth.

Hunston strode moodily away, hanging his head.

This singular individual, Geoffrey Martin, appeared greatly interested in the fate of the unfortunate boys, young Jack and Harry Girdwood, and he got Boulgaris to the spot where the crosses had been erected over the graves by the pious hand of Theodora, the girl who had unwittingly lured them to the fatal trap.

"So here you have buried them?" said Geoffrey Martin.

"Yes, poor boys," said Boulgaris.

"Poor boys," echoed Martin in surprise, "poor boys?"

"Yes, I see no reason for butchering two children, for they were little more."

The new brigand eyed the speaker rather curiously.

"Have you any pity to spare for Harkaway's boy?"

"And why not?" said Boulgaris. "True, Harkaway's our enemy, and I hate him; I'd like to get the upper hand of him; but we don't want to fight boys. Besides, Harkaway is a good sort of enemy: a bold, daring fellow, not a sneak."

"No, that he isn't," said Geoffrey Martin with warmth.

"I am sure he'd never murder a boy, because the boy's father had wronged him."

"True."

"Besides, there is something in this Hunston I don't like. We are bad enough in all conscience, but this brutal butchery will, perhaps, be the ruin of our band."

"Why?"

"Well, we were not loved before; but this brutal deed will make us execrated by the whole country. The government scarcely dare to molest us; they are satisfied at keeping up a show of doing something. But Harkaway is rich and powerful, I am told; English money and English influence will force the government to pursue us, and all for what? Why, for murdering two helpless children, who had done us no wrong; who fell into a trap while saving the life of one of us."

Geoffrey Martin opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Is that true?"

"Yes. Didn't you know the story?"

"No."

"It was the daughter of one of our old comrades, that the boys saved while sailing. Poor girl! If prayers and tears could move men's hearts, hers should have saved the boys."

Geoffrey Martin coughed and blew his nose loudly.

"Ahem!" he said, staring at Boulgaris. "You are a soft-hearted fellow for a brigand."

"Not exactly that either," replied Boulgaris, grinning. "I feel incensed at this deed for its brutality, and for exposing all the band to risks and dangers for the sole purpose of gratifying their revenge."

"Theirs; you mean Hunston's?"

"No; for Toro was interested also in it."

"Toro—Toro," muttered Martin; "why, the name sounds familiar to me. Of course. They knew this Toro in Italy, I remember. He was one of a band that Harkaway and his friend Harvey exterminated."

"It is true, then, about that band?" said Boulgaris, his eyes flashing eagerly.

"Of course."

"You see, then, from that, what cause we have to dread arousing the enemy of such a man as this Harkaway."

"He is an awkward customer, and that's the fact of it; and I have heard, my brave Boulgaris, that if Harkaway once sas he will have revenge, he never fails. Now, let's return."

Back they went together, and as they neared the brigands' camp, they perceived signs of some great commotion.

"What is the matter now?" asked Boulgaris.

"Come with us," replied the first man, "and I will show you."

They silently followed.

Down one of the slopes and then through a narrow pass, and within five minutes' run of the brigands' stronghold they came upon a number of their men gathered around a long figure stretched upon the ground and covered with a cloak.

The brigand who had brought them there silently drew back the cloak, and showed that the figure was the corpse of one of their comrades who had been on guard there.

"Look, another of our men killed. His death, like the first, has been sudden."

A sure, swift hand had pinned him through the body with a long, fine-pointed dagger.

It had pierced his heart, and the point of the blade actually protruded near his shoulder-blade.

"Look there," cried one of the brigands.

"Where?"

"At the handle."

Fastened to the haft of the dagger was a slip of paper on which were these words:

"Remember, Harkaway never forgets an injury!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VILLA AGAIN—A MESSAGE FROM THE ENEMY'S CAMP—HOW A SNARE WAS LAID.

HARVEY carried his project into execution, and went off, leaving Mrs. Harvey, Emily, and Mrs. Harkaway under the impression that he was going about the vessel, and making preparations generally for their departure.

They were one and all anxious to be gone from the place, which was for evermore associated in their minds with the mishaps of the last few days.

When Harvey had been absent forty-eight hours, they grew anxious.

But on the morning of the third day, Nabley, the detective, came with a message from Dick.

He had met him by appointment and brought news.

There was something in Nabley's face which made Harkaway anxious to see him alone.

"Now tell me, Nabley," he said, eagerly; "tell me all. How is Harvey? What does he say of the boys? What is he doing? Has he any plan of action decided?"

"Gently, Mr. Harkaway, gently," said the detective; "you overpower me."

"Oh, Nabley, I say—"

"There—there! don't be impatient. I'll give it all out as fast as ever I can."

"I don't want all," interrupted Jack Harkaway, passionately. "How are my boys? Answer that. Are they safe? No—no! I read it in your face."

And then he dropped heavily into a chair, looking the picture of misery and despair.

Nabley had scarcely a word to say for himself.

The sight of the brave Harkaway so utterly collapsed was more than he could endure.

Jack rallied a little and turned again to Nabley.

"Well, quick, tell me the news."

And then, as Nabley still stammered, he went on:

"I know; save your breath. I knew it; poor boys! poor Harry and my poor brave boy, Jack!"

"Dick Harvey bids you keep your courage up," said Nabley; "not to be downcast. It is quite time enough to be down upon our luck when we find out that the worst is true. The boys may yet live."

"No, no," cried Jack; "I fear my poor boys are no more."

"Let us hope they still live, but meanwhile, Mr. Harvey has treated the brigands as though the worst was true," replied Nabley.

"How?"

Nabley made a significant gesture with his right arm as though stabbing violently at some unseen enemy.

"What, the brave Dick seeking and taking revenge?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes. Two of the Greek brigands have fallen by his hand. The rest will follow, be sure of that; and, moreover, they never suspect whose hand has dealt the blow."

"Not suspect!"

"No, his game has been and will continue to be picking them off in single file. He meets one of them alone, and Harvey makes sure of him by his own strong right arm."

"Oh, brave Harvey," said Jack.

"Yes," said Nabley, "it is revenge. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and I for one should like to see the whole gang food for kites and wolves."

"You have suffered in losing your old comrade," said Harkaway; "judge, then, if you so keenly feel the loss of a friend, what must I feel for my boy—my own flesh and blood?"

"Yes," said Nabley; "I have suffered, but I will yet have a bitter revenge on my poor pal's murderers. He was to me a brave and true friend. Poor Pike! He was foully assassinated."

"Yes, Nabley; he was cowardly shot by the villain Toro. But do the brigands know who is now taking revenge on them?"

"Yes; it is told them in black and white. A paper fixed to each carrion carcass tells that this is another proof of Harkaway's vengeance."

Jack's face flushed crimson at these words.

"Well done, Dick; well done, brave old boy," he muttered; "well done!"

"And he tells me that they are in a rare state about it in the camp. It has thrown all the lot of them into the greatest consternation. Huns-ton has grown very unpopular. It needs very little upon Harvey's part to make sure of him."

"That's brave."

"Now he's growing ambitious. One at a time no longer satisfies him, so he has a scheme for bagging half-a-dozen of the brigands at once."

"How?"

"You know the spot that the boys christened the fig tree grove?"

"I do."

"He pretends to have intercepted a letter (when he 'stole' the money and jewels I took him by way of keeping up appearances), which informs him that one of your party—a Mr. Hardy, or Harpy, he pretended—would be passing through the fig tree grove this evening, with money, on a journey of some importance. As this Hardy or Harpy is a dangerous person, the brigands, on Harvey's advice, are to send six of their best men on the business."

Harkaway's eyes twinkled again at this.

"Now," said Nabley, "we must bait the trap well. I'll be the bait."

"You?"

"Yes."

"But why should you have so dangerous a post?"

"I prefer it," said Nabley, quietly; "besides, although alone, I shall have some staunch and valuable friends with me."

"You speak in paradoxes, Mr. Nabley."

The detective's reply to this was to draw his two hands from his coat pockets, and in each hand there was a six-shooter.

"You are a regular arsenal," said Harkaway, smiling. "But supposing when you raise your hands, they close in upon you and ransack your pockets?"

"I have no need to withdraw my hands to use them. I fire through the pockets."

They must have been made with something of this intention, for they were cut in the side seams of the coat, and were exceedingly roomy.

"Well—well," said Harkaway, jumping up, "when do you go to work?"

"Now."

"Now?"

"There is no preparation to make. Let Mr. Jefferson be sent for. Both of you get your arms ready, and follow me."

"Good! What arms?"

"Short ax, in case of close work, and rifle each. You'll be more than a match for the six Greeks. Besides," he added, with a significant smile, "I shall not be idle."

"Well—well, away with you!" cried Jack; "I am all eagerness to be at work. I shall be quite another man when I have had a brush with these beasts."

"Right, sir!" cried the detective; "they will find a powerful foe in you."

"Yes, Nabley," cried Jack, "my arm is nerved for this fight, and it shall go hard with me but I will have my revenge on those Greek devils for the murder of my poor boy!"

The door opened and Jefferson entered.

"The very man!"

"What, Nabley?" said Jefferson. "What news of Harvey?"

"Mr. Harkaway will tell you all," answered the detective; "my time's up. Follow me as quickly as you can, gentlemen. Sharp's the word."

"Off with you," said Harkaway, growing quite excited at the prospect of a brush with the enemy.

"The fig tree grove," said Nabley.

"Understood."

And off went the detective.

"Jefferson," said Jack, "I am now about seeking my foes, and fear not but I will render a good account of my actions, for against the brigands I feel the strength of a giant."

CHAPTER IX.

WHEREIN MR. MOLE PHILOSOPHISES AND HAS AN ADVENTURE—THE SCENT OF BATTLE—MOLE THE TERROR OF BRIGANDS—ISAAC THE ANNIHILATOR—MOLE'S PRISONER.

IT must not be supposed that Isaac Mole was idle all this time.

He heard of the bold doings of his friends Harkaway, Harvey, and Jefferson, not to speak of the valuable aid of Nabley the detective, and, figuratively speaking, his very soul panted for glory.

"I feel I could conquer by my single hand half a dozen brigands," said Mole to himself; "but still I should prefer to come across a sleeping brigand. But ah, me!" there he sighed deeply, "brigands are as rarely caught asleep as weasels."

Poor old Mole's desire to distinguish himself in this matter was very great.

The plain truth was that poor Isaac was at times badly henpecked.

On these occasions he would assume his most dignified deportment and point to his wooden legs.

"There are proofs, Mrs. Mole," he would say, "that Isaac Mole never shunned the foe in his life."

"Yah—yah!" his spouse would gracefully smile in reply, "dat no fault ob yours, Ikey Mole; de ignorant critters took off your legs bekase you so often lost your legs before."

"Lost them before?"

"Yes."

"Before they were amputated, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Why, Mrs. Mole," and he would draw himself up to his full height, "you have been surely indulging in strong waters."

"No, sar—no, Ikey Mole, not dis gal, sar. You lose your legs continual and your head, too, sar, with strong waters—sperrits, sar—sperrits!"

Poor Mole, he was no match for her, and could only turn for consolation to where he had ever thought to drown dull care.

The bottle.

Mrs. Mole one day surprised him at a sly tipple in the grounds of the villa, and he knew it to his sorrow.

Suddenly popping around the corner, Chloe emptied the contents of a pail over his luckless head.

"Thar, you teetottler—you banderhoper—you good templar! Take a leetle tiddy drop of water with your rum; makes lubly grog well mixed, yah-yah!"

And then the amiable partner of his joys and sorrows bore off her empty pail, leaving her husband to dry and shiver.

"Philosophy, my dear Mole," said the worthy Issac to himself, "philosophy is your physic; think of Socrates and be at ease—ugh! It's precious damp—too much water! I must have an extra drop to keep the cold out."

And up went the inexhaustible bottle again.

"Ha! Massa Ikey!" said a terrible voice close at hand, "you want some more water to mix with it, do you?"

Mole clutched the bottle, jumped up, and rushed wildly to the house, with his loving spouse after him with another pail of water.

* * * * *

From that time Mole scarcely dared have a suck at his bottle within half a mile of the house.

One afternoon, having dined early, Mole went for a walk in the suburbs of the town, and selecting a favorable spot, he reclined gracefully and dropped off into a gentle slumber?

How long he slept he never knew until this hour.

All he knew was that he dreamed that he was the hero of some gallant adventures, wherein the Greek brigands fell before his sword like corn before the reaper's sickle; yea, as the phantom miscreants succumbed to the onslaught of Don Quixote.

Now, while he slept, a man crawled out of the thicket upon all fours and looked eagerly about him.

The singular part of this incident was that although the sleeping Mole was within six feet of this spot, he did not perceive him.

Mole was partly hidden by the thickly-grown bushes.

The man dragged himself painfully on; he was badly hurt.

One of his legs were broken, and he carried no less than three pistol-bullets in his body; in short, it was little less than marvelous that he was able to crawl at all.

The history of this miserable wretch is soon told.

He had been shot down by the unerring aim of Nabley, the detective, and feeling himself badly hurt, he had sought safety in flight while there was yet time.

Dragging his wounded body into the thickly-grown copse, he had lain hidden from sight, baffling the keenest search; and here he had presently lost consciousness.

Loss of blood and anguish had rendered the hapless wretch powerless to help himself, and knowing well what little mercy he had to expect from the Englishmen did they come upon him, had lain there in fear and trembling at every sound until hunger was added to his other torments.

He was nearly blinded with a blow he had received on the face, and now his only hope was to be able to crawl along until he came up with some of his comrades who would help him regain their stronghold in the mountains.

"Oh!" he groaned, "a blight upon the hand that struck me down. Oh!"

And the violence of his pains made him give a deep groan.

Mole moved.

Then opened his eyes; and waking, his glance fell upon a ghastly-looking object, pale and bloody, dragging itself along.

Coming towards him.

Mole gasped.

This was real, he knew at once; there was no doubt about that.

It was one of the Greek brigands, who had seen him asleep, no doubt, and was about to do for him.

Poor Mole.

Cold beads of perspiration stood upon his brow. A channel of sweat trickled down the small of his back.

His very wig stood up on his scalp with terror. What should he do?

Alas! it would soon be all over with him.

The ghastly object crawled on.

A minute more and the wretched man would be up with him.

Now, poor old Mole had been on occasions what is called pot-valiant.

He sought his black bottle for Dutch courage, but before he could raise it to his bloodless lips

the wounded man perceived him and he gave a cry of terror.

"Keep off!" cried Mole, his teeth rattling like a box of dominoes.

The wounded man, half blind as he was, and frightened out of what little sense remained to him, took the black bottle for another revolver such as Nabley had carried; and having a wholesome dread of that terrible weapon, he cowered down, hiding his face on the ground.

"Don't be violent," gasped the wretched Mole.

"Mercy—mercy!" implored the brigand.

"Have pity on me," said Mole, in abject terror.

"Do as you please with me," whined the brigand, "only for mercy's sake don't fire again at such a poor wretch as I am."

"Think of my helpless condition," said Mole.

"I am done to death," said the brigand, faintly.

"I have two wooden legs," gasped Mole."

"Do what you will with me," cried the brigand, in despair, "only give me water—a drop for mercy's sake."

And he prostrated himself in abject submission before the half dead Mole.

Now the latter could not well misunderstand this attitude; but yet he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

"What's his game?" thought Mole; "he is trying the artful dodge on; and he's going to jump up and give me one for myself—not for Isaac. By jingo! What a topper I could give him as he lays there, what a—"

He stopped short.

"My eye! what a hole he has got in his head already."

And then by degrees, in spite of his fears, he was forced to see that this piteous object was not dangerous.

As Mole rose up to look at the brigand, the latter made still more signs of submission, and now he could no longer misunderstand.

It is difficult to say which feeling filled Mole most completely—surprise or satisfaction.

"Oh—oh!" cried Mole; "I feel that my heart tells me I have great courage. Yes, I will capture this desperate brigand with my own brave hands."

Here was a slice of luck.

"I'll just drive him home," said the crafty Isaac to himself, "and then see if Chloe will dare to cheek me as she has done of late. I rather flatter myself I shall take it out of Harkaway and Jefferson themselves."

First, though, he meant to have one more suck at the black bottle.

But now again, to his intense surprise, at the sight of the bottle the wounded man cowered and shrank back in terror.

"Mercy—mercy, great captain," he implored; "as you are strong, be merciful."

"What does he mean?" muttered the astonished Mole.

"Don't fire again," cried the wounded man, feebly; "I never hurt one of your friends. I am not responsible for the two boys' death. It was done without my will, for I don't war with boys and women; ah, how I suffer!"

"Don't fire! Why, what—ah, I see it, he takes the bottle for a pistol."

"March on then," he said, in a terrible voice, "on with you, or I'll fire."

"Don't—don't; mercy!"

"March then, or I'll blow you to atoms," and he presented the black bottle again.

The Greek held up his hands in supplication and moved on.

"Go on!" thundered Mole.

"I'll be your slave, your abject slave," groaned the brigand; "but, oh, great warrior captain, spare my life."

"I'll eat you alive," hissed the cannibal Mole in his ear, "if you don't walk faster!"

"I will—I will."

"Faster still, or you die."

"Pity—pity!"

"Bah!" said the fierce Isaac, contemptuously, "why should I have pity on you after killing a score of your fellows with my own hand? Answer me that."

The other was silent.

In this way, the valiant Mole drove the miserable wretch to the villa.

When, after a long and wearisome journey, they got within a stone's throw of the grounds of the house, Mr. Mole was suddenly startled to hear a loud, shrill cry of alarm, and who should appear before them but Mrs. Mole herself?

"Whateva hab you got there, Ikey?" she demanded.

"A prisoner, my dear," responded Mole.

"A what?" she exclaimed: "whose prisoner?"

"Mine."

"Yourn?"

"Pardon me, my dear—yours, not yourn. Yes, my prisoner," he added, modestly; "I have captured him."

"Where?"

"In the wood."

"What you doing there, Ikey?"

"I was on a hunt. I came across them—five—and a little warm work went forward. The other four," he said, significantly, "I have left on their backs, with a pretty decent sign of my handiwork upon all of them."

Chloe gasped.

"You're a drefful man," said Chloe, "and I'll run for Massa Harkaway."

And she had dashed down the garden, crying out for Harkaway and Jefferson, and goodness knows who besides.

They were ever on the *qui vive* for danger, so down they came with a rush.

"Why, Mr. Mole," exclaimed Jefferson, "you have indeed got a prize."

"However did you manage it?" asked Harkaway, not a whit less startled.

Mole coughed.

"I felt that something was required of me," he answered, with touching dignity and modesty combined, "and so I went on the hunt myself, and fell foul of a few of the Greek vampires."

"A few," echoed Jefferson, elevating his eyebrows; "a few, you said."

"Yes," replied Mr. Mole; "only five."

"Not more?" said Jefferson, laughing; "then you must have felt rather bad in the inside."

"Never, sir," said Mole, getting more and more dignified; "but I left the enemy rather unhappy, in the inside and the outside."

"Indeed!"

"This is the only survivor out of five; question him closely."

Mole had carefully ascertained that the wounded Greek didn't speak a solitary word of English.

"Ask him, I say, what I did for his comrades; how I larded them—how I peppered them, and made them cry peccavi. Damme, Jefferson, old boy, you should have seen me in action; gad, sir, I'm like an old war-horse at the first sniff of powder. Down they went, first one, than the other. Hang me! if I didn't play at skittles with 'em, and I was in that humor, Harkaway, when you can't miss. I'd just cheek the corner pin, and make a royal every go. What do you think of that, Harkaway?"

Old Jack smiled.

"I'm not proficient enough in skittles to appreciate the feat," he answered.

"And so you tackled all this lot single-handed?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Ten."

"I thought you said five."

"Ten, sir, ten in all; five came up at first, but in as many moments they were all on their backs; and then up came another five of them, each heavily armed. I never forget; hang it! I couldn't forget such a job as that very easily. Five of the second lot fell at my first fire; I toppled over three more, and the other one—"

What Mr. Mole might, in his ardor, have been tempted to draw for upon his glowing fancy, it is impossible to say, for just as he reached this point in his fanciful narration, up came Nabley.

"Halloo!" he said, as he caught sight of the wounded brigand; "here's the missing man."

"This," cried the rest of the people present, as with one voice.

"Yes; this is the man I shot down at my first fire; he must have crawled away to hide; why, where is Mr. Mole running to?"

The imaginative old gentleman suddenly vanished from the scene.

He did not relish the presence of such a witness as this.

"This is Mr. Mole's prisoner," said Jefferson, laughing; "you see he has brought in one, after all."

"I bring you something better even than prisoners," said the detective.

"What is that?"

"News."

"Speak; what is it?"

"The brigands have given up Hunston."

Harkaway jumped up at the news.

"That's prime," he exclaimed; "we shall yet have the joy of seeing that villain hung."

CHAPTER X.

THE FIG TREE GROVE—A DOUBLE AMBUSCADE—THE LEECH FISHER—HOW THE TRAP WAS BAITED, AND HOW IT TOOK—SOMETHING LIKE THE OLD FORM—TRIUMPHANT MARCH OF HARKAWAY AND CO.

WITHIN AN HOUR—NAY, LESS—OF THE FOREGOING

conversation you might have seen an aged man wending his weary way along the high road from Athens towards the mountains.

Thickly-grown fig trees leaned over the road, and their well-garnished branches formed a roof of foliage through which no ray of sunlight could penetrate.

He seemed an aged man.

His steps tottered.

It was strange that he did not seek the aid of a stout staff, or walking stick at least.

But no, he preferred to keep his hands in his coat pockets.

Now the coat he wore was a full-skirted frock, much resembling in shape the garment which was worn by our grandfathers, or their fathers, when George the Third was king, with huge pockets in the skirts and lappets.

And into these big pockets the old wanderer's arms were buried up to the elbows.

Perhaps it was because he felt somewhat chilly.

There was a gentle breeze blowing through the trees.

As he went along, he shot sly glances from time to time about him, almost as if he were expecting someone; but he had got nearly over a third of the distance down the fig tree grove before there were the faintest signs of life about him, and there, apparently overcome by the fatigue of his walk, he dropped down upon a moss-grown bank to rest.

He looked up at the leafy canopy overhead, and sniffed down the sweet odors that floated along on the gentlest of zephyrs.

"Not such bad quarters," he muttered to himself (it was in English that he spoke); "not at all bad. There is only one thing required to make this the happiest day of my life; only one thing, and that is, success in my present undertaking—"

He paused.

"Hark!"

What was it?

He heard a faint rustling in the foliage hard by.

This part of the country was reported to be infested with thieves, the regular hunting grounds of the brigands.

A faint smile lurked around the corners of the old man's mouth, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"At last," he muttered to himself—"at last!"

Just then there was a noise as of branches being pushed aside, and dry twigs being crushed; and forth stepped a stalwart peasant, all in rags and tatters, and placed himself, hat in hand, before the old man.

"Halloo!" exclaimed the latter, "why, where did you come from?"

And yet his surprise looked more assumed than real.

"Charity!" replied the beggar, in an imploring tone.

"Charity!" echoed the old man, fumbling in his pockets, "by all means; take this, my honest fellow."

So saying, he dropped a piece of money into his open palm.

"Gold! Yes; a golden piece, by all the saints in the calendar."

The beggar's eyes glistened greedily at the piece.

"Heaven bless you!" he exclaimed; "may you live for ever."

"Don't wish me that," responded the old man; "that is no blessing."

"Not with your riches?" said the mendicant.

"No."

"You are not easily satisfied then."

And then came forth from the beggar a strange sound.

Was it a signal?

It almost appeared to be the result of a preconcerted arrangement, for while the sound of his laughter echoed down the leafy grove, there was a crashing of branches and general breaking of the dried twigs and undergrowth, and out swarmed a group of men numbering perhaps ten or a dozen.

A villainous-looking mob they were, too.

They approached the old man, and were about to surround him, when the first man, who had already profited by the old man's charity warned them off.

"There is no need for violence here," said he, hurriedly, and speaking in their native language; "he will give us up all he has got without so much as dirtying a knife over him."

The old man laughed.

A dry, cynical laugh it was, too, and almost calculated to make one believe that he had understood what they said.

"Who are these people?" he asked of the first beggar.

"Poor men, worthy of your pious charity like myself," was the reply.

"Then they shall have it," replied the old man; "more than they expect."

He looked around him rather anxiously, as if expecting some more people to arrive.

Now that glance was observed by more than one of the men, and it was no very difficult matter to excite suspicion in their minds.

"He expects some one," said the foremost man of the party; "he is a spy."

"See how he's looking about him," observed another.

"What shall we do?"

"Kill him at once."

"Yes, kill him."

"On to him."

And the speaker himself was the first to act upon his own counsel.

He stepped forward to catch the old man by the coat, but the latter retreating a couple of paces, appeared startled.

"Keep your distance, my masters," he said; "keep your distance, because I am a very dangerous fellow."

They laughed at this.

"Dangerous, are you?" cried one of them; "oh, ho! and what is your name?"

"Why, they call me the leech fisher."

"The leech fisher!"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Because I am my own trap and bait and all." They looked puzzled.

"He's mad."

"Daft as he can be."

"Poor old fool. But let us get his money if he has any, without killing him."

"Money!" echoed the self-styled leech fisher.

"Here's plenty."

And with these words he threw a pile of gold pieces upon the ground, making the lawless ruffians' eyes glisten greedily.

"You don't seem yet to understand the parable of the leech fisher," said the singular old man. "You are dense blockheads."

"Ha—ha—ha! hear him," cried the first beggar. "He is quite a treat."

"What I meant was that I am a trap for you. I have set myself to catch you; I am the bait; the leech fishers are their own bait, I am my own. So now come on, my merry men, my unbelieving pagans."

One of the men here laid a rough hand upon his shoulder, when there was a loud explosion.

A flash and smoke issued from the old man's square coat pocket, and the brigand staggered back.

The rest of the party looked utterly amazed.

What was it?

"An ambuscade," ejaculated one of them.

"No—no; it came from the old man's coat skirt. See, it is smoking."

There was a small round hole in the cloth, and it singed and smelt of gunpowder.

"Death to the spy!" cried the Greeks.

Two of the brigands fell upon him, one on each side, when lo! there was a double explosion, and with loud cries of pain each fell back dead.

The rest of the brigands now began to recover from the state of stupefaction into which this sudden and unexpected attack had thrown them, and accustomed to rapid action upon emergencies such as the present, they prepared to fall simultaneously upon this ancient Tartar.

"Oh—oh! What, you think to capture me, do you?" he cried.

In an instant all his feebleness had dropped, and lo! he appeared a very nimble man.

Springing back about six feet, he drew both hands from those capacious pockets, to which we recently drew the reader's attention, and then the mystery was revealed.

Each had held a six-barreled revolver.

"How like you my music, you ruffians?" cried the strange man. "Oh, what would I give if my poor friend, Pike, was with me now?"

Bang!

Another shot and another *hors de combat*.

The foremost of the brigands rolled over, stone dead.

This was warm work.

But as if it had not grown hot enough, there suddenly appeared upon the scene two men armed with rifles and revolvers.

These two men were crack shots, unluckily for the brigands, and they speedily gave proof of their skill.

Two of the mountaineers bit the dust before they could dream of helping themselves.

Not three minutes had elapsed since the firing of the first shot, and already six men were down.

"Surrender!" said one of the new comers, in a loud, authoritative voice.

But instead of responding, one of the Greeks drew a pistol and leveled it at the towering figure of Harkaway, for of course he was one of the marksmen, but before he could pull the trigger, bang went another chamber of the old man's revolver, and the pistol fell to the ground.

The hand which had held it was helpless, the arm shattered at the elbow.

There was in truth something dreadful in this carnage.

But neither Harkaway nor Jefferson thought anything of this.

Indeed, horrible as it may sound, they killed a brigand with as little compunction as they would have slaughtered a wolf.

"Surrender!" cried Harkaway, for the second time. "Yield now, or by Heavens, you shall all die on the field."

The Greeks looked around for assistance.

They were five.

The enemy only three.

As a rule, these ruffians were not deficient in bull-dog courage and ferocity; but this desperate fighting had surprised and frightened them.

"Yield, ruffians, to better men than yourselves."

They paused.

"To pause is death," cried Jack Harkaway, in a loud voice.

As the last word was spoken, up went the two rifles.

"Nabley," cried the American.

"All right," answered the disguised old man.

"Look after that outside brigand on your left."

"I will, and his neighbor, too."

"If you can."

"I am thinking of my murdered friend, Pike, and I feel I can take twenty such vagabonds!" uttered the detective, fiercely.

"I'll take that big fellow, Jeff," said Harkaway. "You pot the other."

"Good."

"Now, then, you villains, when I count three, look out," said the detective, with a mild expletive.

Not mild enough for repetition here, by the way.

"One, two—"

The brigands, having held a hurried consultation, here threw down their arms.

Just in the very nick of time.

Two seconds more and they would have had no chance.

"Now," cried Harkaway, still with gun ready for use, "forward! march!"

The brigands looked mischievous for a moment.

So did the rifles.

So did the revolver.

These weapons were great persuaders.

With slow, unwilling steps the five men marched onward into captivity.

"I'll see to the wounded," said the detective.

Four of the brigands had been killed outright.

Others were writhing on the ground, and using bad language.

"Two and four make six," muttered Mr. Nabley; "six and four are ten. Why, I could have sworn that they were eleven. Yes, certainly, there was another. Where the deuce could he have got to?"

The most diligent search, that is, the most diligent search possible under the circumstances, failed to find the faintest trace of the missing man.

"That's the one I gave that smack in the face," said Nabley to himself. "Well, I know I gave it to him pretty warm, besides that. He hasn't got far. He has crawled somewhere to die, I suppose."

And then, by dint of threatening the wounded with instant death, he persuaded them to crawl after the rest.

* * * * *

And when our three adventurers marched into the town with their prisoners between them, there was a loud outcry.

Cheers, bravos, huzzahs at every step of the way.

"That's the Englishman, Harkaway," said one of the bystanders, as they marched onward toward the prison, "and that is the American, Jefferson."

"Dreadful men those to make enemies of. I have heard that Harkaway has destroyed hundreds of brigands and pirates."

"Yes, I have heard so," answered the other. "It was an evil moment for those villains of brigands when they shot the poor young Harkaway. They will lose many a life for those two."

"Ah! that they will."

"Who is that driving the two wounded men before him?"

"That is an English secret police officer. He is even more dangerous than the others. He has killed four men with his own hands in this skirmish. I believe an old friend of his has been murdered by the brigands, and he has sworn to have revenge."

"It is taking the law into their own hands with a vengeance."

"All honor to them for their bravery."

"Three cheers for Harkaway!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET WORK GOES ON—WHO IS THE TRAITOR?—THE FALL OF A FAVORITE—THE RECRUIT'S MUSINGS—A STRANGE REVELATION.

IT was true.

Hunston had been given up by the brigands.

They knew but little of Harkaway, but that little told them that he was not the man to make a false assertion.

They felt sure that Hunston had received more money for the ransom of the boys than he had acknowledged, and so they voted his doom.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have been shot.

As it was, they had learned so terribly to respect Harkaway, that they gave up his enemy in preference to taking the law in their own hands.

Not a day passed but one or more of the brigands suffered at the hands of the enemy, whose revenge they had so unwisely provoked.

Let them go armed, with a support of armed men within easy call and on the watch, it could not avail them.

They were picked off, slowly, surely, quietly, mysteriously.

And this was the chief reason that they sought to negotiate with the Harkaway party, by giving up their enemy Hunston.

But still the work went on.

There was only one man in the whole band who had the courage to lay the facts before them.

"We must move away from this part of the country," he said. "Once let us see how matters turn out with our comrades who have fallen into the hands of these English people, and then we must be gone."

But while they waited more fell.

Several got taken prisoners, and the band presented a very thin appearance.

The day of trial approached for the brigands, of whom Hunston was one.

And the verdict was universally foreseen.

They were condemned to death for the murder of the two boys, Harry Girdwood, and young Jack.

In five days they were to be executed.

In the court there was one person who heard the sentence with the greatest possible terror.

This was Theodora.

Why should it so affect her?"

It was surely not that she could have any sympathy with such rogues and murdering villains.

Justice was swift in the execution of its decrees here, and the condemned brigands were doomed to death within five days.

"Five days!" Theodora repeated to herself again and again, as she left the court, "five days! So short. Well, then I must do my duty, come what may. To-morrow may yet be in time—or the next day."

Still she was sorely perplexed.

"If I avow all, I shall incur the undying enmity of the band," she reasoned; "and if I keep silent, I shall be a murderer of those men—men with whom I have grown up, and been taught to look upon as brothers."

She had some strange secret upon her mind which troubled her sorely.

In her dire perplexity she went to the camp, and did her best to excite the men to an effort on behalf of their imperilled comrades.

Pedro listened to all she had to say.

Then he gave his opinion.

"We are clearly bound to make an effort to save our friends," he said; "we cannot let our comrades perish without attempting to save them."

"No—no!" answered the brigands, with one voice.

But perhaps the most demonstrative of all was the last recruit who had joined the brigands—the Englishman, known amongst his new comrades as Geoffrey, the discharged servant of Harkaway.

"When shall the attempt be made?" said Pedro; "that is the next question."

"At once," said Toro.

He looked around for some supporters; but he looked in vain.

Toro was no longer in good odor.

His connection with Hunston had rendered him exceedingly unpopular.

He was too daring a spirit for them to break out into open murmurs, but quietly he was deposed; and then Pedro was admitted as leader.

When the question of giving up Hunston to the enemy was first mooted, Toro had violently opposed it; but his was the one solitary voice that was lifted for his old comrade.

"The only chance of success," suggested Pedro, "is to wait and attack the procession on the way to execution. The prison itself is too well defended for us to hope for success."

"That's so," said Geoffrey; "and failure would ruin them."

"Surely."

It was arranged consequently that the attempt should be made upon the day appointed for the execution.

The utmost secrecy should be kept as to their plans.

"Let not a word be breathed of our resolves anywhere," said Pedro, "unless we are altogether in council assembled, for I fear that we have had a traitor in our camp."

"A traitor!"

"Ay."

"One or more?"

"One, at least, would not surprise me after all that has occurred."

"Nor me either," said Geoffrey.

Saying which, he glanced significantly over his shoulder in the direction of Toro.

The latter, on the rejection of his plan, had stalked moodily away and was walking up and down buried in bitter reflections.

"Hah!"

"If I could believe that possible," exclaimed one of the brigands, "it would be a speedy end of his rule here."

Saying which he drew his long dagger significantly.

"Well—well," said Geoffrey, who acted cautiously, and was satisfied at having unsettled their minds with regard to the Italian bravo, "let us seek the traitor, and when found—"

He left the rest unsaid; but they knew well what was meant.

The only person quitting the camp was Theodore.

So that no traitor could well carry the news to the enemy this time.

"Let no precaution be neglected," said Pedro; "we must choose trusty sentinels. I'll take the watch at the gap myself."

"Good."

"Geoffrey."

"Present, captain."

Toro gave a start at that reply, which clearly gave the death knell to his own command.

"Do you mount guard at the cross roads below?"

"Leading to the fountain avenue, do you mean, captain?"

"Yes."

"Good."

And shouldering his musket, he gave a stiff salute and marched off.

"Perhaps you would not have far to look for traitors," said Toro, as Geoffrey disappeared, "did not your prejudices blind you?"

"Do you allude to Geoffrey?" asked Pedro, coldly.

"Judge for yourself."

"Speak out boldly."

"I have been bold enough for you," said Toro, passionately.

"Speak in the presence of him you would accuse."

"I fear no man here," cried Toro, fiercely.

"Nor does any man fear you."

"Then, by thunder, he shall!" and out came his sword.

At this unmistakable demonstration, several of the brigands made signs of cutting in, and the Italian saw that it was a desperate game he was venturing on.

He saw it just in time, for the brigands were ready, one and all, to fall upon him with dagger and sword.

Gradually he fell back and left them, but the seed was sown.

The few words which Geoffrey had spoken had done their duty well.

"So—so," muttered Geoffrey, as he went; "Hunston is done for, and Toro shall soon follow. Thirty-two men have been 'dropped' for our dear boys—thirty-two. Gad! but it is a goodly number. They will learn to respect the name of Jack Harkaway in this miserable land—and to rue the day that they molested any one of us. Thirty-two—ay, and the rest shall follow, as sure as my

name is—stop! Who goes there? Speak! By Heaven, Nabley—just in time, but silence."

CHAPTER XII.

THEODORA'S ERRAND—FATAL NEWS—THE MYSTERY DEEPENS—HER RESOLVE—TO THE VILLA—INTERVIEW WITH HARKAWAY—THE VOICE FROM THE GRAVE—A HEART OF GOLD.

THEODORA made her way with all speed to the water-side prison, to which allusion has been previously made.

The head jailer of this prison had a daughter of the same age as Theodora.

His wife had nursed them both as babes, and Theodora looked upon them as her parents, and on the girl as her sister.

To them she was wont to appeal at any time of trouble, and now she came to tell them her cares.

She asked for her foster sister, and called her aside.

"What is it now, Theodora, dear?" asked the jailer's daughter, anxiously. "You look quite pale and haggard."

Theodora shook her head sadly.

"I have got involved in a matter in which I am responsible."

"But the evil is over?"

"No."

"As far as you are concerned, is it not, dear?"

"No; I say no. Are not our men to be executed for the murder of the two boys?"

"And richly they deserve it!" exclaimed Mariana.

"No—no. They cannot deserve it for what they are innocent of."

"It is no fault of theirs," retorted the jailer's daughter; "they are guilty in intention, at least."

"Well—well, Mariana. I am not so base that I could see them suffer death, knowing what I know—what we know, in fact."

"But you would not betray me?" exclaimed the jailer's daughter, anxiously.

"No, darling. The necessity for danger to you—to us, I may say, is entirely done away with."

"What do you mean?"

"The gallant men will rescue their comrades on Thursday on the way to execution."

"What?" ejaculated Mariana; "Thursday?"

"Yes."

"Then you don't know," she exclaimed, with a wild, scared look.

"Know what?"

"That it has been changed. They are to be executed in the morning."

Theodora gave a cry of terror, and staggered back.

"No—no, Mariana," she said, wildly; "it is impossible."

"It is true."

"When was this made known?"

"Just now."

"Why was it altered?"

"Because they have discovered that an attack was meditated by the brigands, upon the way to execution on Thursday."

"Impossible!" cried Theodora, starting up. "Why it was only just agreed upon. I have left them not two hours ago, and it was then that they came to this resolution."

"It is already known here. A messenger from the great Mr. Harkaway sought the governor with the news, and as Mr. Harkaway is all powerful here, the execution takes place tomorrow morning at daybreak. It is said that he has his own spies in the camp of the brigands."

Theodora clapped her hands to her head, and paced wildly up and down.

"There is no way out of it, dear Mariana," she cried. "No way—no way, but one."

"What is that?"

"I will see this Mr. Harkaway, and tell him all."

"But you will ruin us all."

"No. He will be overjoyed with the news I bring, and will do as I wish—all I ask to repay me for the words of comfort which I have for him."

"I doubt it."

"I know him well," retorted Theodora. "I know his boys too well to believe the father so bad and merciless as you suppose him. All his enmity would be forgotten, could he but believe the glad tidings which I have for him."

"Then the knowledge of this will risk all our lives."

"No, I am convinced that all will be well."

"Theodora!"

"Delay me not. My duty points clearly to that."

And before she could offer to interfere further with her resolve, Theodora was gone.

She fled like a deer.

Nor did she pause for breath until she was at the villa.

* * * * *

"Mr. Harkaway will not see anyone," said the servant.

She eyed the panting girl with suspicion, as Theodora leaned for support by the door, while her left hand clasped her beating heart.

The tragic events of the past few weeks, and the murder of Marietta in Mrs. Harkaway's bed-chamber, had led them to distrust everybody and everything.

"I must see him," gasped Theodora.

"Impossible," returned the girl, curtly; "call to-morrow in the afternoon."

"Afternoon," returned Theodora. "After six in the morning it will be too late. It is life and death, I tell you. Go and tell him."

"Obstinate girl, I tell you Mr. Harkaway has serious business on at daybreak, and has gone to rest, giving the strictest orders that he is not to be disturbed."

"Call him," returned Theodora, with forced calmness, "and he will have no need to go on this business at daybreak."

"Hah!"

"Do you hear?"

The girl retreated backwards, never moving her eyes from Theodora.

"This is some hired assassin," she thought. "They can't tackle my master, and knowing how wary he is, they have hired a girl to do the deed."

She was about to thrust to the door, when Theodora, in sheer despair, burst in and cried at the top of her voice to Harkaway:

"Mr. Harkaway—Mr. Harkaway! come—come, and hear news of your poor boys, I say!"

At this wild outcry in the middle of his room, Jack stepped out of his room.

"Keep back, sir; keep back!" screamed the servant. "She's an assassin!"

At these words, Harkaway slipped back into his room, and reappeared armed with a pair of pistols.

"Now what is it you require, my girl?" he demanded of Theodora.

"A few words with you."

"Don't trust her!" shrieked the servant; "I saw a knife in her girdle! Don't trust her!"

Theodora smiled faintly.

"I am alone, unarmed," she said; "the great Mr. Harkaway, the hero of the day here, is surely not afraid of me."

"I am afraid of no one," returned Jack; "but I warn you, my girl, that if any treachery be meditated, each of these pistols carries a man's life."

"It cannot affect me," returned Theodora, calmly. "I come to bring you news which will gladden your heart, and I have no fear of your enmity."

Her words and her manner thrilled Harkaway strangely. He lowered the pistols.

He had her shown into a room, and followed her in.

"Sit down there, my girl, and tell me all," he said, trying to appear composed, while he was in reality singularly moved.

"I come, Mr. Harkaway," said Theodora, who had now regained all her calmness, "to bring you the most welcome news that ever gladdened your ear—that ever sent balm and comfort to your bruised heart."

Jack turned pale; he thought he had heard her speak of his boys before leaving his room.

"Speak on," he said, his voice faltering.

"Tell me, sir, what could I say that would restore happiness to you—to your wife—to your friends and home? What could I say to lift the veil of mourning from your house and hearts? to restore the former gaiety to this tomb-like place?"

Jack Harkaway listened as one in a dream.

"Girl," he said, in a voice that was almost inaudible, "you know not what you say."

"I am perfectly cognizant of all," she replied.

"Then your errand here is to torture me?"

"You wrong me."

Harkaway looked her sternly in the face.

And Theodora bore his glance without flinching.

"Your manner tells me," he said, "that you know better than anyone what alone could restore happiness here."

"You are right."

And she gravely inclined her head as she answered.

"And you know it is impossible," he said.

"It is not."

"Not impossible!" ejaculated Harkaway.

"Know you what you say?"

"Perfectly."

"Girl—girl," cried Harkaway, passionately, "the grave cannot give back its dead."

"It does—it has."

Harkaway gasped for breath.

She was about to speak on, when the ghastly pallor of his countenance and its wild, haggard expression frightened her.

"Girl, go on, tell me," he cried excitedly; "do not play with me."

"Calm yourself, Mr. Harkaway, pray—"

"Go on—go on."

"You alarm me."

"Speak, in mercy's sake," implored Harkaway: "this suspense is ten thousand times worse than all the good or bad news which you could bring me—are you fooling me?" he added, springing up and seizing his pistols.

"No."

"Speak on then."

"Your son Jack—"

"Yes—yes; my boy—my own darling brave lad—what of him?"

The girl suddenly turned pale. "Hark," she said, "I think I hear footsteps outside; quick! to the window, I think we are watched," and the girl sank in terror at Jack's feet.

Harkaway, with one bound, sprang to the window, pistol in hand, ready for use.

But it was a false alarm; and having satisfied himself that there were no eavesdroppers, Harkaway returned to his seat, and the girl resumed the conversation.

"Are you able to bear—"

"Bad news? Ay, the worst; what can be worse than what we already know?"

"No; I mean good news."

Jack turned pale again.

"Yes," he said, with a sickly smile; "the novelty would perhaps affect me—speak then—you said my boy—"

"Lives," answered the girl, in a solemn voice. Harkaway staggered back at the word.

"Lives—my boy lives!"

"Yes."

"Impossible!" he faltered; "why, Harvey saw the grave."

"And I, too—what's more, I saw them in their graves—and that is more than anyone you know has done."

"In their graves!" echoed Harkaway, as if stunned; "and yet you say they live."

"Yes."

"Why, girl—girl, you would wring a wretched father's heart with torture!"

"No; I would comfort you. I saved their lives. I come now to you to return them to you."

"Where are they?"

"Close at hand; but I wish to ask you in return—"

"All you will—anything, everything—only bring me back my boys—bring me back my boys!"

"I only ask you to save the lives of men unjustly accused of the murder, and who have been doomed to die to-morrow at daybreak."

"Granted—why, it was granted unasked," said Harkaway. "I would not for worlds have such a crime laid at my charge."

"Then I may safely reckon upon your word?"

Harkaway drew himself up proudly.

"If a man had put that question, he would have paid for his temerity."

"Enough," said the girl; "I see that I may count upon you."

Harkaway said nothing to this.

The words were almost an insult.

"Will you come with me to your son and his friend?"

"Yes."

He sprang up with the greatest alacrity, but a sudden fancy crossed him, and he seized the girl by the shoulder.

"You are not playing me false?" said Jack.

"Look in my face and be assured," said the girl, promptly.

He gazed long and earnestly at her, and she bore his fixed look unflinchingly.

"Yes—yes," he said, more to himself than to her; "you are truthful—I am sure of that—but I'll not neglect any precaution; for my head is so sorely perplexed by all you have told me that I scarcely know if I am asleep or waking."

He pressed his brow with his open hands, and then looking carefully to the priming of his revolvers, he started out with the girl; and as they issued from the grounds of the villa, he spoke his last words of mistrust before giving her his whole confidence.

"You see, Theodora," he said, for she had told

him her name, "I don't hang back. I freely confide in you."

"You do well."

"I believe so—see that my confidence is not misplaced, and you shall have no cause to repent it."

"Your words would imply a promise of reward for me."

"Yes."

"I seek none."

"I am willing to believe it, but still my fixed resolve—"

"Your fixed resolve could not make me take it," said the girl, proudly. "I have told you my object in my present mission; I have no other. I seek only to do justice—no more."

Harkaway was greatly surprised at this, but as he stole a sidelong glance at her, surprise was not the only expression in his face.

Admiration was strongly mixed with it.

"Tell me where we are going?" he asked, presently, as they got clear of the town.

"To the prison by the water."

"What for?"

"They are there."

"Impossible!"

"You will see."

"But in prison—how came they there? In prison! Why, then, without knowing it, I have been probably twenty times within earshot of both."

"Yes."

"How came they there? no half measures now. Surely this is the time for revealing all?"

"And now, Mr. Harkaway, I will tell you all as we walk on. The seeming mystery shall remain so no longer."

So saying, Theodora began the brief but startling narrative which follows—and which may fairly be entitled:

THE DEAD ALIVE.

"Your dear son Jack and his friend Harry Girdwood saved my life when I was in danger of drowning at sea. They brought me safely ashore only to fall into the hands of my remorseless companions, the mountaineers. Ah, I see you would call them by something less gentle in sound. Well, it was a planned thing. I was the decoy, but alas! I thought but little then how soon I was to repent of my share of that evil work."

"Go on."

"I will, to the end, even though you should learn to loathe me. Well, a price was put on their heads."

"Which I paid."

"You paid one-fifth."

"No—no; I paid all, as demanded."

"Hunston returned to the camp with only one hundred pounds, and they voted the death of the two boys. Poor boys! both brave boys. The bravest veteran on the battlefield never faced death with the heroic calmness of those two young heroes, sir."

"Bless you for those words, my girl," exclaimed the gratified Harkaway. "I am proud of my dear boy."

"I demanded their release—I implored—I begged—I prayed in the most abject terms. But they had felt the weight of your hand too often. They and theirs had suffered so much that I was powerless. I could only obtain one small concession."

"Say on—say on!" exclaimed Harkaway. "What was that? I burn with eagerness to know more of my boys."

"I was to do the last sad honors to the noble dead. Three were to be executed; one of themselves, a traitor called Lirico. By dissimulating to Hunston—the viper! how I tremble with horror at the very name—I obtained one concession: Lirico was the first to suffer, the boys were to follow."

"Oh, Hunston! villain!" groaned Harkaway, "villain!"

"The execution took place at daybreak. I waited on the firing party. When the wretched Lirico was dealt upon, I passed round and gave the men to drink from a spirit keg which I had specially provided. Then, while they feasted upon the drugged spirit, I passed round and reloaded the muskets for what they thought the final butchery."

"Well—well, do not torture me, girl. Quick, tell me the end."

"Can you not guess?"

"No—no. Quick, tell me all."

"In loading the muskets I forgot the bullets."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed old Jack, half hysterically. "I see it all now, brave girl."

"The rest was an easy task. As the men fired, the boys fell back in the grave and simulated death, as I had instructed them over night; and

now you can understand how I saw them in the grave and yet can prove that they live."

"I do. Girl, you are brave and good; I know not how to thank you for the lives of my poor boys."

"The night before their great trial, I exacted a solemn promise from them that they would follow me to a hiding-place without the least offer of resistance."

"I begin to see. But how did you contrive—"

"To get them secreted in the great prison?"

"Yes."

"You shall hear. My foster-sister is the daughter of the head jailer. Her lover is completely at her mercy, and he holds a superior post in the prison. It was the only condition upon which I could spare the brave boys' lives, and so they were forced to yield."

"And all this time we might have been spared the bitterest agony."

She hung her head.

"I know it, but I dared not speak sooner, for I feared to betray my friends."

"You may trust me," said Jack.

"I know it, for I have saved your boys."

* * * * *

They reached the prison.

"Sebastian," said Theodora, presenting Harkaway to her foster-sister and the latter's lover, "this is Mr. Harkaway."

The Greek official bowed with an air of constraint.

"Theodora has told you all, sir."

"Yes, you have risked much to save my boys' lives."

"Since I can count upon your forbearance," said Sebastian, "I will say no more. Follow me to the presence of the boys."

So saying, Sebastian led the way through the stone-paved passages to the tower overhanging the sea, in which the cell of the two boys was situated.

At the base of the tower were jagged, sea-beaten rocks.

Beside the tower, at about half the height of the tower, reckoning from the level of the sea, was a gravelled terrace covered with a waterproof canopy, so as to form a sort of shed.

And looking out of the tower windows as they passed up its steep inner staircase, Harkaway inquired what this place was.

"That is used as the prison mortuary."

"Those black, ugly outlines there are—"

"Bodies."

"Ugh!"

"They are put into those black bags in lieu of winding sheets, then placed into those rough wooden shells, which are lowered to the prison cemetery below by that crane you see to the right."

"A very poor look-out," said Harkaway, with a shudder.

But away with such dull thoughts.

Here he was on the threshold of new joy—new life.

"Your boys are here," said Sebastian, pausing before a huge barred door.

He undid the fastenings, and pushing open the door, made way for Harkaway to pass in.

"Enter, sir," he said.

Harkaway's heart beat high.

He pushed open the door—entered.

"Where are they?"

"There."

A momentary pause.

"There's no one there," said Harkaway, in a tone indicative of powerfully-suppressed emotion.

Dire apprehensions of evil stole over both Sebastian and Theodora, as they followed Harkaway into the cell.

"Theodora," gasped Sebastian, staggering back, "they are gone."

"Where? How?"

"They must have escaped."

"Liar!" yelled Harkaway, suddenly springing back and drawing his six-shooter, "this is some plot. Thieves! murderers! You think to fool me; but you shall pay the penalty for your villainy. You are in an injured father's grasp. Die, brigands!"

CHAPTER XIII.

YOUNG JACK AND HIS COMRADE, HARRY GIRDWOOD—DEAD, OR ALIVE?—THE RIDDLE UNRAVELLED—THE PLAN IN CIPHER—A RELIC OF THE PAST—EUREKA!—THE CIPHER UNRAVELLED.

Now for young Jack.

Once more let us see the bold young Harkaway, and his brave comrade Harry.

Too long have we been absent from them.

Too long have we been forced by the exigencies of our history to leave, not only the Harkaway family and party generally, under the cruel impression that the two boys had been foully murdered, but the reader likewise.

They lived.

Ay, it was every word true that Theodora had said.

Sebastian was not a whit less truthful.

When he opened the door of the cell in the tower, he fully expected to find the two boys there.

Where were they?

By what jugglery had they contrived to get out of such a fortress as that place?

This the present chapter is to relate.

To give it clearly, however briefly, we must go back to the day of their entrance into their gloomy prison home.

Jack and Harry were alone.

"This is a rum go, Jack," said Harry Girdwood; "what do you think of it?"

"Precious dull, old boy," grumbled young Harkaway.

"Better than a grave on the mountain side."

"It is just that," said young Jack. "But it wouldn't be quite so good if this sort of thing was meant to be permanent."

"Growler—growler," said Harry Girdwood. "Why, I call these famous diggings after that hole they meant us to rest in while the worms made meat of us. Besides, we must get away."

"How?"

"Escape."

Young Jack looked up at the word, and his heart beat a little quicker,

But he said nothing.

Frowning walls on all sides.

The cell was fully eighteen feet high, and the window was close up by the ceiling.

"If we want to get out of this," said young Jack, "we must begin operations from this moment."

"Good."

"Do you know, Harry, what is to be the first step?"

"No."

"To get at that window."

"But it is about eighteen feet high."

"Well, we must reach it," said young Jack.

Both the boys were expert gymnasts.

The greasiest of greasy poles was vanquished by either with the greatest ease.

In the stormiest weather they could mount into the topmost parts of the rigging on board ship.

And the consequence was that the morning after their entrance into their prison, found young Jack perched up at the window looking down at his comrade and fellow prisoner, and giving graphic descriptions of all he saw there.

"What's on the other side, Jack?"

"The sea—the open sea, old fellow," cried Jack.

"And below?"

"The sea again, old fellow."

"To the right?"

"The sea—the sea—the open sea, old fellow. Water—water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink. At least it would be an awful drop to get at it."

"Can you see anything to the right?"

"Water only."

"Is that all?"

"Yes—halloo!"

Something fell.

A roll of something white and soft dropped at Harry Girdwood's feet, and he hastened to pick it up.

Something white, we said.

Well, it had once been white, but now it had got very considerably discolored with age and dust, which seemed to indicate that it had been a long while up on the shelf in its hiding place.

Yes, its hiding place.

They opened the bundle, and found it to be composed of three slips of cotton, upon which were written in red ink, curious things which they could not make much of.

Upon one of these pieces of cotton were certain cabalistic signs, such as figures, algebraical marks, and geometrical figures.

Upon another was traced a plan of some building.

A third was a sectional view, drawn roughly, but upon architectural principles, and marked with initial letters of reference.

"This is a rum go," said Harry Girdwood, laughing.

Young Jack had dropped from his perch, and joined his fellow prisoner on *terra firma*, and together they pored over these singular rags.

Now young Harkaway soon lost patience, and

speaking contemptuously of their find, he proposed pitching it through the grated window, into the sea.

"Not I," said Harry; "there's something here which it will amuse me to puzzle out."

"If you like to kill time that way, Harry," answered young Jack, laughing, "no harm; there's plenty of time to kill in this dreadful dungeon."

And puzzle over this precious treasure Harry did.

The cloth upon which were the cabalistic signs, was headed with certain words, which were all but illegible, and this he managed to construe:

"Simple cipher, left in hopes that it may yet serve some unfortunate Englishman to escape from the tender mercies of this hole."

Below this were the following figures and signs—

3. 15. 21. 14. 20.—6. 15. 21. 18.—19. 20. 15. 14. 5.
19.—21. 16.—6. 18. 15. 13.—7. 18. 15. 21. 14. 4.—
20. 23. 15.—6. 18. 15. 13.—19. 9. 4. 5.—15. 6.—3. 8.
9. 13. 14. 5. 25.—Neath } C.—23
Press }

8. 1. 20.—9. 19.—it revealed.

Now when Harry Girdwood had got through the above puzzle once or twice, he was in a regular fog.

The only result was to get himself heartily laughed at by his fellow-prisoner.

So Harry Girdwood kept what he knew of the matter to himself.

Upon the same day, toward sundown, when Sebastian came around to bring their food, Harry Girdwood said:

"We are not the first Englishmen who have been here, my friend."

Sebastian gave him a sharp glance, as he answered:

"How do you know that?"

"There is no mystery in it," replied Harry Girdwood; "I saw some words written in pencil on the wall."

"Where?"

The eagerness of his manner aroused the curiosity of both the boys.

"Somewhere here," replied Harry, pretending to seek for the marks upon the wall.

But, of course, he found nothing.

"It is strange," he said, still looking about; "for I made sure it was hereabouts somewhere. I saw some words which made me sure that it was occupied by an Englishman once."

"You are right," replied Sebastian; "quite right. An Englishman named Terence Dougherty—"

"That Englishman was Irish," said young Jack.

"Possibly; but he was a priest. He was confined here for a long while. So long, that he went mad."

"Mad, did you say?"

"Yes, and raving at last; his madness appeared to have so much method in it that it quite deceived our head doctor."

"How did he deceive the head doctor?"

"By his apparent sanity. He was as mad as a March hare, and he used to rave about having discovered the way out of the prison."

The two boys pricked up their ears at this speech.

"What was more natural?" said Sebastian. "A prisoner is always thinking how he can get away."

"Of course."

"And yet," said Sebastian, "the old priest was sure he had discovered the way to elude our vigilance when he chose to put his plan into execution; and his dying words startled us."

"How?"

"He said to the doctor within twenty minutes of drawing his last breath: 'Doctor, you think I am mad. Not a bit of it, and I tell you that I have given my life to the study of prison-breaking—getting out of this particular cell—and, doctor, I should have got out if the great commander Death had not ordered me off by another route. As it is, I leave my work for the benefit of the first Briton who shall fall into your claws and drop into my cell, and then—mark me well—he'll profit by my work, unless he be a greater fool than you have taken me to be, and get away.'"

"He was very mad," said young Harkaway.

"Very."

Harry Girdwood said nothing.

Harry Girdwood arose suddenly from his puzzle.

"Eureka!" he cried; "I have discovered it."

"What?" demanded the startled Jack.

"The cipher. It is alphabetical. Listen here."

Young Jack approached.

"It is clear as daylight," said Harry, "these figures correspond with the letters of the alphabet—

"Count four stones up from ground. Two from side of chimney. Press underneath. See what is revealed under it."

"Hurrah!" cried young Jack.

"Hurrah!" yelled Harry Girdwood; "but stop. Let us see if there is anything in it, for we may yet escape."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT THE CIPHER DID FOR THEM—THE END OF THE PASSAGE—NEARLY SAVED—BACK AGAIN—LOST—THE DEAD-HOUSE ON THE TERRACE.

FOUR stones up.

Two across.

"Do you understand it now, Harry?"

The latter scratched his head and looked about.

"I understand it well enough," he replied; "but there is one difficulty."

"What?"

"A tool."

"Let us try with our hands first," said Jack.

And so saying, he set to work himself to try as he suggested.

"One, two, three, four, and two up. Good! Now, Harry, lend a hand here. Come."

Harry Girdwood dropped on one knee beside his companion, and together they pressed the stone indicated in the singular cipher.

For a moment they felt no effect, but after a minute's effort they found that they had made an impression.

The discovery set them all aglow.

"Once more."

"Harder yet."

"Of course; only mind, Jack, no jerking."

"All right."

"We must work without making any noise; a jerk might bring down one of the stones with a clatter, which would alarm the guards."

"Caution is our watchword."

Soon they had the satisfaction of seeing the stone revolve and drop out into their arms.

Then they saw that beyond the hole thus left there was an open space.

It was pitch dark.

Now, the hole in the wall was only just big enough for one of them to squeeze through, and Harry Girdwood pushed in eagerly—and then he perceived that beyond was a sort of tunnel on a small scale, with a roughly-hewn flight of steps at the end of it.

"I can see some steps," said he.

"Go on," said Jack, with feverish eagerness.

"I will; but you go to the door, Jack, and listen."

Jack stood eagerly watching at the dungeon door.

Young Jack was full of eagerness.

Harry had disappeared, and he could not see nor hear him.

"All right."

The answer came in a hollow, echoing sound, which indicated that Harry Girdwood had made some considerable progress.

This increased his eagerness greatly.

* * * * *

"Harry."

No answer.

He was too far for young Jack's voice to reach him.

Quitting his post at the door, young Jack ran back to the hole in the wall and called out eagerly to his exploring comrade:

"Harry—Harry!"

"Halloo!"

"Come back, quick! I can hear some one coming."

"The deuce you can."

Back he scrambled as fast as the narrow space would allow of, and he was soon in the cell again.

"What is it?"

"I heard the bell go and the iron door along the passage outside. Sebastian is coming."

"Confound it! Look what a precious mess."

The displacing of the stone had left traces of the work.

But having seen their danger, they were prepared to provide against it."

Quick as thought they swept up the dirt, mortar, and rubbish, and threw it into the hole.

* * * * *

They were alone.

Young Jack was full of deep thought.

Then, joining hands, they raised the stone and lifted it into its place.

At that moment the key turned in the massive and half rusty lock.

Sebastian entered the cell, tray in hand.

He had not the faintest suspicion that anything was wrong.

"Will you leave the tray, Sebastian?" said young Jack.

"Why?"

"For us to work up our appetites; we have none to speak of now."

"Very good," returned the man; "there can be no harm in that."

"Of course not."

Sebastian then left the room.

"Thank goodness he's gone!" said young Jack, who was all impatience to see what Harry was to do next.

Harry Girdwood watched until the door was fairly closed, and then turned again to the hole in the wall.

"Come along. Follow me, Jack."

"Trot on," said young Harkaway. "I'm after you."

They both scrambled through the hole and when they were upon the other side, they replaced the stone.

And this done, the cell wore its original aspect.

Their way now lay down a rugged flight of steps roughly cut in the solid earth.

The greatest care was necessary to avoid stumbling.

At length Harry Girdwood came to a standstill.

"Jack," he said, in a whisper.

"Here."

"Keep close now."

"Right."

"Nearer. Lend me a hand here. That's it. Now help me raise the stone here."

"Are you sure you are right?"

"Certain."

"Why?"

"This is exactly the position of the stone we have to lift away that old Dougherty describes in his plan."

Young Jack said no more, but lent his aid, and together they shifted the stone from its place.

There was something leaning against the opening.

They pushed it aside, and stepping over a pile of sacks, found themselves in a covered shed overlooking the sea.

A place of curious aspect, with no sign of life in it.

All was as still and gloomy-looking as if it were a huge mausoleum.

"I know what this place is," said Harry Girdwood.

"What?"

"It must be the dead-house on the terrace that I see noted down in old Dougherty's plans."

* * * * *

While they were in the dead-house upon the terrace, a stirring scene was being enacted in the cell in the tower above, where they had only lately vacated.

In fact, Jack Harkaway the elder had only just entered the cell with Sebastian as they found themselves upon the terrace.

"Where are we now?"

There were several ugly-looking long boxes, whose shape was uniform and suggestive, standing upon tressels.

Besides these, there were no objects in the room or shed beyond a few badly-filled sacks which rested against the wall.

They looked anxiously about them.

Nearly facing the place where they had made their entrance was a door, and this they tried without a moment's loss of time.

Fast.

Inmovable.

"The window, then," said Harry Girdwood.

Back they ran on tip-toe to the window, and pushing open the casement, they looked out.

The sea.

Between thirty and forty feet below, and lashing the very base of the prison.

They turned to each other simultaneously:

"Ugh!"

"No chance here."

"This is a funny go."

"Well, Jack," said Harry, ruefully, "I'm glad you find it funny; for my part, I don't see the joke."

"Your friend, old Dougherty did, no doubt."

"Don't be hard on poor old Dougherty," said Harry, laughingly. "It is very likely that his plan is complete, if we could only find it out."

"Where is it?"

"In our cell," said Harry; "I'll go back and get it."

And putting aside the sack, he pressed his way into the opening.

Young Jack glanced around him at the boxes on the tressels.

An unpleasant feeling stole over him.

He did not relish being left alone with the dead.

He felt convinced that those ugly boxes did contain the bodies of dead prisoners.

"I'm with you, Harry," he said.

After him he pressed, and up the long, narrow tunnel made by old Dougherty they passed.

Sometimes on all fours; sometimes standing nearly upright.

"A few steps more, and we are there," said Harry.

"Hah!"

"What now?"

"Listen!"

"I can hear voices," said Harry, in a whisper. "This is the stone which is all we have to displace to get back to the cell."

"Then the voices are there?"

"Yes."

"By jingo!" exclaimed young Jack, "then they must have discovered our absence already."

"Of course."

"How I should like to yell out something! Wouldn't it startle them just a little?"

"Don't be foolish, Jack," said his companion, uneasily. "You would ruin us."

"They'd never discover where we were. Shall I startle them?"

"No. Our only chance of safety depends upon keeping snug."

"All right."

They could hear noisy tones of anger, which denoted that something unusual had occurred.

"There are several people there," said Harry, listening intently at the stone.

"By Jove! how I should like to give them a cheer."

"Keep quiet," exclaimed Harry. "You will ruin us."

But, by a mere chance, he was wrong there.

Had young Jack really indulged in his propensity of devilment on this occasion, it would have saved them many hours of mental anguish and of bodily suffering, for the angry words uttered in the cell but lately tenanted by the two boys were spoken by Jack Harkaway the elder!

Yes.

Cruel fate was playing them a sad trick.

They were now actually fleeing from their father and protector.

The voice raised in anger, and whose echo came but feebly to them in their hiding-place, was his.

Harkaway's.

And thus were these loving hearts parted by a few inches of stone wall.

The boys, on the one hand, taking the confused sounds for the murmur of their enemy's voice.

And at that very moment Harkaway was nearly distracted to have all his hopes dashed rudely to the ground.

And in his anger, two lives were sorely endangered.

Sebastian and Theodora were both menaced—ay, both.

Harkaway could only believe that they had been fooling him, and that he had been trapped there with a view to further treachery.

His rage, in consequence, knew no bounds.

But we must now follow the boys.

"Back we go, or we shall be captured," said Harry Girdwood.

Young Jack led the way back as fast as the narrow space would permit.

And soon they were in the dead-house again, and groping about here, they presently came upon a cupboard in which they discovered a number of tools.

"Luck at last," ejaculated Harry.

"Here, let's make sure of these two knives," said young Jack.

They were long-bladed weapons, something similar in shape to the American bowie.

They took one each and placed them in their waist belts.

They little thought then of the singular yet immense service these were to be to them.

Now barely were these knives secreted when they were startled by the sound of heavy footfalls upon the stone-paved passage beyond the dead-house door.

"What shall we do now?"

Young Jack stepped up to the door, and listened intently for awhile.

"There are only two people," he said to his comrade, Harry, in a whisper.

"Only two. Well, that's quite enough, I should say."

"Let us hide behind the door," said young Jack, eagerly, "and then fall upon them, and make a dash for liberty."

The steps drew nearer and nearer.

"Let us hide here," said Harry, pushing the lid off one of the long coffins or shells.

But even as he did so, both boys started back with looks of horror.

And why?

The removal of the coffin lid revealed a ghastly corpse, the face showing the last agonies which the dead man had suffered, and they, to judge by the distorted face and twisted mouth, must have been horrible indeed.

They pushed back the lid.

"Ugh!"

"Horrible—horrible!" gasped young Jack.

The footsteps sounded nearer.

They were coming to this place, whoever it was.

The boys looked about them in despair.

At the last moment young Jack's eye alighted upon an empty sack upon the ground, lying beside the full ones to which we have previously alluded.

"Let's get in that."

"Good."

Harry Girdwood jumped at the proposition.

Now the sacks were very large, and made of coarse canvas thick enough to avoid falling into folds, which would reveal the contents to anyone at a glance.

So, quick as thought, young Jack held it open while Harry got in, and then Harry, holding up the sides of it with both hands, stood erect while young Jack joined him.

"This is a novel way of jumping in sacks," said the irrepressible Jack.

"Hush!"

"They come."

A key was heard grating in the rusty lock, and as the boys inclined against the other sacks so as to look as much like one of the pile as possible, the heavy door ground sullenly ajar, and two ugly-looking, black-visaged men entered the shed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLACK TRADE—A TRAFFIC IN DEATH—A PLACE OF HORROR—CAN IT BE TRUE?—TWO BOYS IN ONE SHROUD—A FIGHT WITH A SHARK—GIVING HIM THE SACK—DEEP-SEA FISHING ON A NOVEL PLAN.

THE two black-looking ruffians looked about them stealthily, as though they were on no good errand there.

Then one of them listened at the door awhile.

"You had better lock the door, Fleon," said one of the men. "What we have to do mustn't be overlooked."

"True."

The boys heard the door closed and locked, and the sound seemed to lock out another hope for them.

"Now, Fleon, come here."

"Well, what now?"

"We must come to terms."

"Of course, Barthes; but there is no need to go far into that matter; the terms are simple enough."

"You are allowed forty-five francs for each burial, that is, for cost of the shell and sheet."

"No, forty only."

"Well, forty; and if I sign the register in my quality of head gravedigger, you can go and get your money at once; besides, you will have my sacks."

"You drive a bargain like a Jew. Keep your sacks."

"And drop the bodies out into the water?"

"Of course."

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"They would float."

"No matter, the sharks below would soon take care of the few that floated."

"Are we agreed," cried Fleon, "for halves?"

The other made some grumbling rejoinder, but grumbling, he closed with the proposition.

"Very good—very good," said Fleon, rubbing his hands. "Now let us cast them up."

"One, two, four, six, eight, eleven, thirteen," said Barthes.

Now they were standing so close to the pile of sacks that the boys in their novel place of concealment could not only hear every word, but they actually felt the speakers brushing against them.

But they dared not speak.

They even held their breath.

They heard, and partly understood, yet could not believe that they guessed aright.

What could it mean?

Surely not—

No—no—no!

The thought maddened the boys.

It was too horrible.

Yet what did the rest of the sacks contain?

Besides, there were no other sacks in the shed but these.

Both the boys heard the conversation.

Yet so fearful a notion was it that each felt that he had not heard aright.

They dared not speak.

And their worst fears were indeed correct.

* * * * *

"Halloo!"

"What now?"

"Thirteen."

"Yes."

"You are wrong," said Fleon. "Count them again."

The man obeyed.

"Thirteen, I was sure of it."

"Well, that's a rum go," said Fleon. "I am positive that there were only twelve."

"There's a baker's dozen now," said Barthes, with his brutal laugh; "the more the merrier."

"Right."

"What are you staring at?"

"I can't make out the thirteenth one," said Fleon.

"Well, I don't see that that's anything to weep over. Thirteen at dinner is an awkward number, they say; but I dare say that the sharks won't object to it; they're not so weak-minded as to be superstitious. Ha—ha—ha!"

But still Fleon could not get over this last sack.

"I've got it."

"What, where the last sack came from?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, out with it, and ease your mind—not that I care much, so long as we land the money."

"Why, they have brought the last one in from the hospital fever-ward; I heard the bell tolling at midnight, and I remember now that they said another was all but gone."

"Why, of course," said Barthes; "and see how the lazy beggars haven't even taken the trouble to tie the neck of the sack round."

"That's easily done."

Before the boys could guess what was next to take place, the sack was jerked over, and a rope was twisted around the neck of the sack, thus excluding nearly all the air.

But young Jack had already grown desperate, and he held his knife in his hand ready for an emergency.

The jerk had sent the knife through the sack about two inches, and it prodded Barthes in the hand.

"Halloo!"

He yelled and drew back his hand.

"What now?"

"I've cut myself."

"Why, how on earth did you manage that?"

"There's a knife sticking out of the sack. Let's open it and get it out."

"What for?"

"It's a pity to throw such a thing into the sea."

The boys shivered.

This time there could be no mistaking the words.

"Jack," whispered Harry Girdwood, "do you hear?"

"Yes; let us show ourselves, and go back to prison, or—"

But before he could complete his proposition, they were jerked in the sack up on to their feet.

"Come, let's do it quick."

"Good!"

"Phew!" grunted Barthes; "it's precious heavy."

"Heavy enough for two," said Fleon.

"Over with it. Now, then, both together at the word three."

"One."

"Two."

"Three."

They raised the sack on to the window ledge and—

"Oh, murder!" cried Barthes, his cheek blanching with terror. "I felt something move in the sack."

"So did I," faltered Fleon.

"It's alive!" cried the man Barthes, turning pale.

"Over with it, then; sharp!"

It was poised for an instant, no more, over the dizzy height.

Then down it went.

As it fell, a wild, despairing shriek went up to Heaven.

A piteous cry.

It was cut short by the sharp flight through the air.

A splash.

Then all was still.

* * * * *

The two ruffians stood staring at each other, their eyes half starting from their sockets.

The perspiration stood out like big beads upon their foreheads, and they shook like ague-stricken wretches.

"Look over," said Fleon, in a hoarse whisper.

"What do you see?"

"I see," responded the other, in the same constrained tone. "There's a shark! I see his fin."

"There's plenty more in the neighborhood."

"No; he's all alone, and, my eye! what a feast he'll have!"

"I see him! He strikes for the bottom. He's got him, whether he's dead or alive."

CHAPTER XVI.

A WATERY GRAVE—THE BED OF THE OCEAN—A BOLD STROKE FOR LIFE—THE RACE WITH A SHARK—A NARROW SQUEAK—HOW TO GIVE A SHARK THE SACK—THE BOAT—"FREE AS AIR!"—A STRANGE ENCOUNTER WITH A GENTLEMAN ON TWO WOODEN LEGS.

Poor boys!

Unhappy Jack.

Luckless Harry Girdwood.

The fall from such a height to the water would render death almost a certainty.

Hand and foot bound, they could not move.

Yet stay.

Could it be possible that these noble boys were to fall victims to the villainy of such ruffians?

No.

As they reached the bottom, the two boys, momentarily deprived of their senses by their fall, were partially restored by the shock.

Instinctively the knives go to work.

Young Jack here rendered the most signal service.

He held his knife in a tight grip even as they fell.

And barely did they come in contact with the bed of the ocean, when young Jack stabbed upwards, and, at a single stroke, cut his way out of the sack.

At the self-same instant his left hand grappled his friend and trusty comrade, Harry.

To kick the earth fiercely with his feet was to Jack a natural impulse, and, striking upwards, he made for the surface.

Will he reach it?

Doubtful.

It seemed a weary—wary way to get. But now the water grows lighter and less dense. Jack and Harry can see about them.

Both are experienced swimmers and divers, and they always keep their eyes open under the water.

And now this habit serves them in good stead, for looking up, Jack perceives a huge floating mass bearing down upon him through the water.

Jack and Harry have Fleon's words, and the cruel jokes of Barthes still ringing in their ears, and they know, alas! too well what it means.

A shark.

With the energy of despair, both boys strike out, diving lower.

And now for a moment their fate seems sealed.

They discover that their rapid movements are stopped by the sack which they have not got quite clear of, and which, puffed, follows them up through the water in their progress to the air and light.

And this, by a miracle, saves them.

The voracious monster of the deep strikes for the two boys, but its unwieldy body, not answering its helm with the swiftness of an ordinary fish, it shoots fairly into the ripped-up sack, in which it gets its huge maws entangled.

A strange trap for a shark.

A shark trapped by no more cunning contrivance than a canvas sack, ripped up on one side.

And while the fierce beast wallows about in this novel trap, lashing the water furiously with its fins, the two boys gain the surface of the water, marveling at their escape.

Together they turn over on their backs, andgulp down big draughts of the welcome air.

Presently they get their breath again.

"Jack, old boy, are you safe?" was Harry's question.

"For the present, Harry, old chum. How do you feel?"

"Saved, thank Heaven!"

"God bless you, old man."

Thus the two boys, rescued from such a complication of perils, pass their first moments in getting a gasp of Heaven's fresh air.

Each is full of thankfulness for the other's escape, and for the moment thinks but little of himself.

Suddenly young Jack reverts to their last danger.

"Where is he, the monster?" he asks, with great eagerness.

"The shark?"

"Yes."

"Don't know."

"Doesn't relish us."

"Fancies we sha'n't be tender after getting out of prison so recently."

Young Jack and Harry were only just out of the jaws of death, and already they were joking.

"Have you got your wind yet, Harry?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me. I can see a sort of archway in the prison wall, and a boat, I think."

"Ha!" cried Harry, "I remember."

And turning easily over, he shot out for the prison wall.

A few strokes brought them in sight of a flight of stone steps under the archway.

And as they catch sight of the steps on ahead, they become conscious that they are being pursued by another of those ravenous beasts of which Barthes and Fleon were talking in such cruel levity.

"Quicker, Harry, quicker, old lad!" gasps young Jack.

"Right, I see."

Three vigorous strokes, and Harry grasps a chain fastened to a staple in the wall to which a boat is moored.

He is on the steps.

Then grappling with young Jack, he helps him up with a desperate jerk.

Just in time.

Hardly are they landed when the hideous monster shoots past them.

"Ugh! you beast!" growled young Jack.

And he shook his fist at the shark, while the latter, after shooting past, turned round and paddled leisurely back, making sure of them yet.

But they were not left long at liberty to enjoy the shark's disappointment, for they were startled by a great noise and commotion going forward in the prison.

Young Jack looked inquiringly at his companion.

"Our absence discovered?"

"I suppose so. Let us make tracks as soon as we can."

With this they set to work to loosen the boat.

It took them some little time to force the padlock which held the chain to the staple, but together they accomplished it.

Then, lowering their sculls, they pushed out to sea.

"Free," murmured young Jack, exultantly; "free at last."

"Don't be too fast."

Now each took a scull, and with long, deep strokes they pulled for their own safe part of the coast.

Wind and tide were in their favor, and they shot through the water at racing pace.

"Pull round, here's our place. Now for it."

"Both together," said Girdwood, excitedly.

Three long, vigorous strokes, and the boat grounded far up high and dry upon the shingle. They ran on wildly.

Ah, how their young hearts beat at the sight of it.

"Won't they be surprised and pleased?"

"And shan't we? Ah, me—halloo! who's this coming here? Why, blow me Harry, do you see who it is?"

"Of course; it's old King Mole!"

"Mr. Mole—Mr. Mole—Mr. Mole!" they both yelled out. "Here we are safe back!"

The old gentleman staggered back in amazement.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed. "Surely—yet, no! it can't be!"

"Can't it, though?"

And to put all doubt at rest, they both seized hold of a hand, and nearly dragged him off his frail supports.

The continuation of this story can be found in The 5 Cent Wide Awake Library No. 1244, entitled "JACK H

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